

History of India

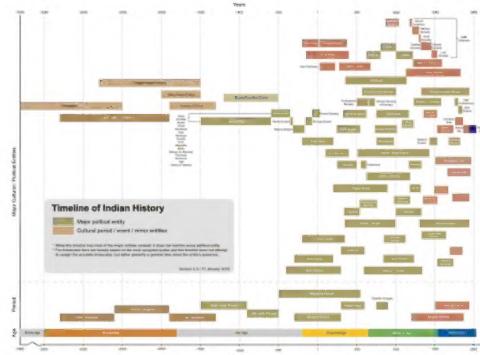
Anatomically modern humans first arrived on the [Indian subcontinent](#) between 73,000 and 55,000 years ago.^[1] The earliest known human remains in South Asia date to 30,000 years ago. [Sedentariness](#) began in South Asia around 7000 BCE; by 4500 BCE, settled life had spread,^[2] and gradually evolved into the [Indus Valley Civilisation](#), one of three early [cradles of civilisation](#) in the [Old World](#),^{[3][4]} which flourished between 2500 BCE and 1900 BCE in present-day [Pakistan](#) and north-western India. Early in the second millennium BCE, [persistent drought](#) caused the population of the Indus Valley to scatter from large urban centres to villages. [Indo-Aryan tribes](#) moved into the [Punjab](#) from [Central Asia](#) in several [waves of migration](#). The [Vedic Period](#) of the Vedic people in northern India (1500–500 BCE) was marked by the composition of their extensive collections of hymns ([Vedas](#)). The social structure was loosely stratified via the [varna system](#), incorporated into the highly evolved present-day [Jāti](#) system. The pastoral and nomadic Indo-Aryans spread from the Punjab into the [Gangetic plain](#). Around 600 BCE, a new, interregional culture arose; then, small chieftaincies ([janapadas](#)) were consolidated into larger states ([mahajanapadas](#)). Second urbanization took place, which came with the rise of new [ascetic](#) movements and religious concepts,^[5] including the rise of [Jainism](#) and [Buddhism](#). The latter [was synthesized](#) with the preexisting religious cultures of the subcontinent, giving rise to [Hinduism](#).



Indus Valley Civilisation, at peak phase
(2600–1900 BCE)



Indian cultural influence (Greater India)



Timeline of Indian history

[Chandragupta Maurya](#) overthrew the [Nanda Empire](#) and established the first great empire in ancient India, the [Maurya Empire](#). India's Mauryan king [Ashoka](#) is widely recognised for the violent [kalinga war](#) and his historical acceptance of [Buddhism](#) and his attempts to spread [nonviolence](#) and [peace](#) across his empire. The Maurya Empire would collapse in 185 BCE, on the assassination of the then-emperor [Brihadratha](#) by his general [Pushyamitra Shunga](#). Shunga would form the [Shunga Empire](#) in the north and north-east of the subcontinent, while the [Greco-Bactrian Kingdom](#) would claim the north-west and found the [Indo-Greek Kingdom](#). Various parts of India were ruled by numerous dynasties, including the [Gupta Empire](#), in the 4th to 6th centuries CE. This period, witnessing a [Hindu](#) religious and intellectual resurgence is known as the [Classical](#) or [Golden Age of India](#). Aspects of Indian civilisation, administration, culture, and religion spread to much of Asia, which led to the establishment of Indianised kingdoms in the region, forming [Greater India](#).^{[6][5]} The most significant event between the 7th and 11th centuries was the [Tripartite struggle](#) centred on [Kannauj](#). Southern India saw the rise of multiple imperial powers from the middle of the fifth century. The [Chola dynasty](#) conquered southern India in the 11th century. In the early medieval period, [Indian mathematics](#), including [Hindu numerals](#), influenced the development of mathematics and astronomy in the [Arab world](#), including the creation of the [Hindu-Arabic numeral system](#).^[7]

[Islamic conquests](#) made limited inroads into modern Afghanistan and [Sindh](#) as early as the 8th century,^[8] followed by the invasions of [Mahmud Ghazni](#).^[9] The [Delhi Sultanate](#), established in 1206 by Central Asian Turks, ruled much of northern India in the 14th century. It was governed by various Turkic and Afghan dynasties, including the [Indo-Turkic Tughlaqs](#).^{[10][11]} The empire declined in the late 14th century following the invasions of [Timur](#)^[12] and saw the advent of the [Malwa](#), [Gujarat](#), and [Bahmani](#) sultanates, the last of which split in 1518 into the five [Deccan sultanates](#). The wealthy [Bengal Sultanate](#) also emerged as a major power, lasting over three centuries.^[13] During this period, multiple strong Hindu kingdoms, notably the [Vijayanagara Empire](#) and [Rajput states](#) under the [Kingdom of Mewar](#) emerged and played significant roles in shaping the cultural and political landscape of India.^{[14][15]}

The early modern period began in the 16th century, when the [Mughal Empire](#) conquered most of the Indian subcontinent,^[16] signaling the [proto-industrialisation](#), becoming the biggest global

economy and manufacturing power.^{[17][18][19]} The Mughals suffered a gradual decline in the early 18th century, largely due to the rising power of the [Marathas](#), who took control of extensive regions of the Indian subcontinent, and numerous [Afghan invasions](#).^{[20][21][22]} The [East India Company](#), acting as a sovereign force on behalf of the [British government](#), gradually acquired control of huge areas of India between the middle of the 18th and the middle of the 19th centuries. Policies of [company rule in India](#) led to the [Indian Rebellion of 1857](#). India was afterwards ruled directly by the [British Crown](#), in the [British Raj](#). After [World War I](#), a nationwide struggle for independence was launched by the [Indian National Congress](#), led by [Mahatma Gandhi](#). Later, the [All-India Muslim League](#) would advocate for a separate Muslim-majority [nation state](#). The British Indian Empire was partitioned in August 1947 into the [Dominion of India](#) and [Dominion of Pakistan](#), each gaining its independence.

Prehistoric era (before c. 3300 BCE)



[Mesolithic](#) rock art at the [Bhimbetka rock shelters](#), [Madhya Pradesh](#), showing a wild animal, perhaps a mythical one, attacking human hunters. Although the rock art has not been directly dated,^[23] it has been argued on circumstantial grounds that many paintings were completed by 8000 BCE,^[24] and some slightly earlier.^[25]



A [dolmen](#) erected by Neolithic people in [Marayur, Kerala, India](#).



[Stone Age](#) (6,000 BCE) carvings of [Edakkal Caves](#) in [Kerala, India](#).

Paleolithic

[Hominin](#) expansion from Africa is estimated to have reached the [Indian subcontinent](#) approximately two million years ago, and possibly as early as 2.2 million years ago.^{[26][27][28]} This dating is based on the known presence of [Homo erectus](#) in [Indonesia](#) by 1.8 million years ago

and in East Asia by 1.36 million years ago, as well as the discovery of stone tools at [Riwat](#) in [Pakistan](#).^{[27][29]} Although some older discoveries have been claimed, the suggested dates, based on the dating of [fluvial sediments](#), have not been independently verified.^{[28][30]}

The oldest hominin fossil remains in the Indian subcontinent are those of *Homo erectus* or *Homo heidelbergensis*, from the [Narmada Valley](#) in central India, and are dated to approximately half a million years ago.^{[27][30]} Older fossil finds have been claimed, but are considered unreliable.^[30] Reviews of archaeological evidence have suggested that occupation of the Indian subcontinent by hominins was sporadic until approximately 700,000 years ago, and was geographically widespread by approximately 250,000 years ago.^{[30][28]}

According to a historical demographer of South Asia, Tim Dyson:

Modern human beings—*Homo sapiens*—originated in Africa. Then, intermittently, sometime between 60,000 and 80,000 years ago, tiny groups of them began to enter the north-west of the Indian subcontinent. It seems likely that initially they came by way of the coast. It is virtually certain that there were *Homo sapiens* in the subcontinent 55,000 years ago, even though the earliest fossils that have been found of them date to only about 30,000 years before the present.^[31]

According to Michael D. Petraglia and [Bridget Allchin](#):

Y-Chromosome and Mt-DNA data support the colonisation of South Asia by modern humans originating in Africa. ... Coalescence dates for most non-European populations average to between 73–55 ka.^[32]

Historian of South Asia, [Michael H. Fisher](#), states:

Scholars estimate that the first successful expansion of the *Homo sapiens* range beyond Africa and across the Arabian Peninsula occurred from as early as 80,000 years ago to as late as 40,000 years ago, although there may have been prior unsuccessful emigrations. Some of their descendants extended the human range ever further in each generation, spreading into each habitable land they encountered. One human channel was along the warm and productive coastal lands

of the Persian Gulf and northern Indian Ocean. Eventually, various bands entered India between 75,000 years ago and 35,000 years ago.^[33]

Archaeological evidence has been interpreted to suggest the presence of [anatomically modern humans](#) in the Indian subcontinent 78,000–74,000 years ago,^[34] although this interpretation is disputed.^{[35][36]} The occupation of South Asia by modern humans, initially in varying forms of isolation as hunter-gatherers, has turned it into a highly diverse one, second only to Africa in human genetic diversity.^[37]

According to Tim Dyson:

Genetic research has contributed to knowledge of the prehistory of the subcontinent's people in other respects. In particular, the level of genetic diversity in the region is extremely high. Indeed, only Africa's population is genetically more diverse. Related to this, there is strong evidence of 'founder' events in the subcontinent. By this is meant circumstances where a subgroup—such as a tribe—derives from a tiny number of 'original' individuals. Further, compared to most world regions, the subcontinent's people are relatively distinct in having practised comparatively high levels of endogamy.^[37]

Neolithic



[Mehrgarh](#) site in present-day [Balochistan](#),
[Pakistan](#)



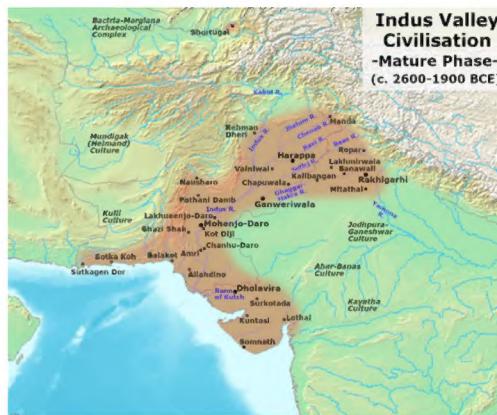
Mehrgarh painted pottery, 3000–2500 BCE^[38]

Settled life emerged on the subcontinent in the western margins of the Indus River alluvium approximately 9,000 years ago, evolving gradually into the Indus Valley Civilisation of the third millennium BCE.^{[2][39]} According to Tim Dyson: "By 7,000 years ago agriculture was firmly established in Baluchistan... [and] slowly spread eastwards into the Indus valley." Michael Fisher adds:^[40]

The earliest discovered instance ... of well-established, settled agricultural society is at Mehrgarh in the hills between the Bolan Pass and the Indus plain (today in Pakistan) (see Map 3.1). From as early as 7000 BCE, communities there started investing increased labor in preparing the land and selecting, planting, tending, and harvesting particular grain-producing plants. They also domesticated animals, including sheep, goats, pigs, and oxen (both humped zebu [*Bos indicus*] and unhumped [*Bos taurus*]). Castrating oxen, for instance, turned them from mainly meat sources into domesticated draft-animals as well.^[40]

Bronze Age (c. 3300 – 1800 BCE)

Indus Valley Civilisation



Harappan Period at peak, c. 2600 – 1900 BCE

The [Bronze Age in the Indian subcontinent](#) began around 3300 BCE. The Indus Valley region was one of three early [cradles of civilisation](#) in the [Old World](#); the Indus Valley civilisation was the most expansive,^[3] and at its peak, may have had a population of over five million.^[4]

The civilisation was primarily centred in modern-day Pakistan, in the Indus river basin, and secondarily in the [Ghaggar-Hakra River](#) basin. The mature Indus civilisation flourished from about 2600 to 1900 BCE, marking the beginning of urban civilisation on the Indian subcontinent. It included cities such as [Harappa](#), [Ganweriwala](#), and [Mohenjo-daro](#) in modern-day Pakistan, and [Dholavira](#), [Kalibangan](#), [Rakhigarhi](#), and [Lothal](#) in modern-day India.



[Mohenjo-daro](#) (one of the largest Indus cities). View of the site's [Great Bath](#), showing the surrounding urban layout.



Dholavira, a city of the Indus Valley civilisation, with [stepwell](#) steps to reach the water level in artificially constructed reservoirs^[41]



Archaeological remains of washroom drainage system at [Lothal](#)

Inhabitants of the ancient Indus River valley, the Harappans, developed new techniques in metallurgy and handicraft, and produced copper, bronze, lead, and tin.^[42] The civilisation is noted for its cities built of brick, and its roadside drainage systems, and is thought to have had some kind of municipal organisation. The civilisation also developed an [Indus script](#), the earliest of the [ancient Indian scripts](#), which is presently undeciphered.^[43] This is the reason why [Harappan language](#) is not directly attested, and its affiliation is uncertain.^[44]



Three [stamp seals](#) and their impressions showing Indus script characters alongside animals: **unicorn** (left), **bull** (centre), and **elephant** (right); at [Guimet Museum](#)

After the collapse of Indus Valley civilisation, the inhabitants migrated from the river valleys of Indus and Ghaggar-Hakra, towards the Himalayan foothills of Ganga-Yamuna basin.^[45]

Ochre Coloured Pottery culture



Sinauli solid-disk wheel cart, photograph of the Archaeological Survey of India.^[46]

During the 2nd millennium BCE, Ochre Coloured Pottery culture was in Ganga Yamuna Doab region. These were rural settlements with agriculture and hunting. They were using copper tools such as axes, spears, arrows, and swords, and had domesticated animals.^[47]

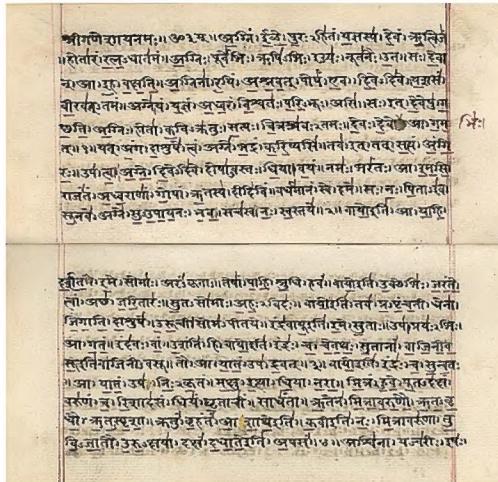
Iron Age (c. 1800 – 200 BCE)

Vedic period (c. 1500 – 600 BCE)

Starting c. 1900 BCE, Indo-Aryan tribes moved into the Punjab from Central Asia in several waves of migration.^{[48][49]} The Vedic period is when the Vedas were composed of liturgical hymns from the Indo-Aryan people. The Vedic culture was located in part of north-west India, while other parts of India had a distinct cultural identity. Many regions of the Indian subcontinent transitioned from the Chalcolithic to the Iron Age in this period.^[50]

The Vedic culture is described in the texts of [Vedas](#), still sacred to Hindus, which were orally composed and transmitted in [Vedic Sanskrit](#). The Vedas are some of the oldest extant texts in India.^[51] The Vedic period, lasting from about 1500 to 500 BCE,^{[52][53]} contributed to the foundations of several cultural aspects of the Indian subcontinent.

Vedic society



An early 19th century manuscript in the Devanagari script of the [Rigveda](#), originally transmitted orally^[54]

Historians have analysed the Vedas to posit a Vedic culture in the [Punjab](#), and the upper [Gangetic Plain](#).^[50] The [Peepal](#) tree and cow were sanctified by the time of the [Atharva Veda](#).^[55] Many of the concepts of [Indian philosophy](#) espoused later, like [dharma](#), trace their roots to Vedic antecedents.^[56]

Early Vedic society is described in the [Rigveda](#), the oldest Vedic text, believed to have been compiled during the 2nd millennium BCE,^{[57][58]} in the north-western region of the Indian subcontinent.^[59] At this time, Aryan society consisted of predominantly tribal and pastoral groups, distinct from the Harappan urbanisation which had been abandoned.^[60] The early Indo-Aryan presence probably corresponds, in part, to the [Ochre Coloured Pottery culture](#) in archaeological contexts.^{[61][62]}

At the end of the Rigvedic period, the Aryan society expanded from the north-western region of the Indian subcontinent into the western [Ganges](#) plain. It became increasingly agricultural and was socially organised around the hierarchy of the four [varnas](#), or social classes.^[63] This social structure was characterised by the exclusion of some indigenous peoples by labelling their occupations impure.^[64] During this period, many of the previous small tribal units and chiefdoms began to coalesce into [Janapadas](#) (monarchical, state-level polities).^[65]

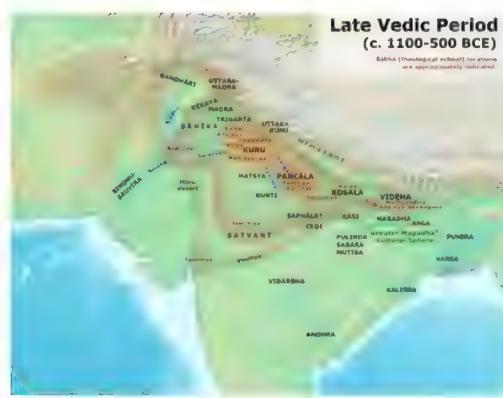
Sanskrit epics



Manuscript illustration of the [Battle of Kurukshetra](#).

The Sanskrit epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were composed during this period.^[66] The *Mahabharata* remains the longest single poem in the world.^[67] Historians formerly postulated an "epic age" as the milieu of these two epic poems, but now recognise that the texts went through multiple stages of development over centuries.^[68] The existing texts of these epics are believed to belong to the post-Vedic age, between c. 400 BCE and 400 CE.^{[68][69]}

Janapadas



Late Vedic era map showing the boundaries of [Āryāvarta](#) with Janapadas in northern India, beginning of Iron Age kingdoms in India – [Kuru](#), [Panchala](#), [Kosala](#), [Videha](#)

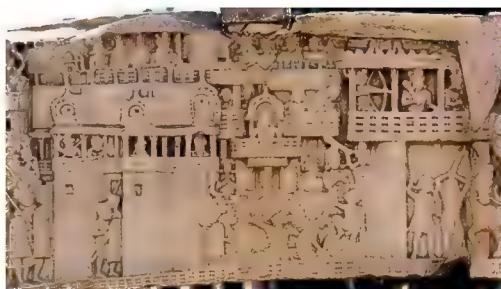
The [Iron Age](#) in the Indian subcontinent from about 1200 BCE to the 6th century BCE is defined by the rise of Janapadas, which are [realms](#), [republics](#) and [kingdoms](#)—notably the Iron Age Kingdoms of [Kuru](#), [Panchala](#), [Kosala](#) and [Videha](#).^{[70][71]}

The [Kuru Kingdom](#) (c. 1200–450 BCE) was the first state-level society of the Vedic period, corresponding to the beginning of the Iron Age in north-western India, around 1200–800 BCE,^[72] as well as with the composition of the [Atharvaveda](#).^[73] The Kuru state organised the Vedic hymns into collections and developed the [srauta](#) ritual to uphold the social order.^[73] Two key figures of the Kuru state were king [Parikshit](#) and his successor [Janamejaya](#), who transformed this realm into the dominant political, social, and cultural power of northern India.^[73] When the

Kuru kingdom declined, the centre of Vedic culture shifted to their eastern neighbours, the Panchala kingdom.^[73] The archaeological PGW (Painted Grey Ware) culture, which flourished in north-eastern India's Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh regions from about 1100 to 600 BCE,^[61] is believed to correspond to the Kuru and Panchala kingdoms.^{[73][74]}

During the Late Vedic Period, the kingdom of Videha emerged as a new centre of Vedic culture, situated even farther to the East (in what is today Nepal and Bihar state);^[62] reaching its prominence under the king Janaka, whose court provided patronage for Brahmin sages and philosophers such as Yajnavalkya, Aruni, and Gārgī Vāchaknavī.^[75] The later part of this period corresponds with a consolidation of increasingly large states and kingdoms, called *Mahajanapadas*, across Northern India.

Second urbanisation (c. 600 – 200 BCE)

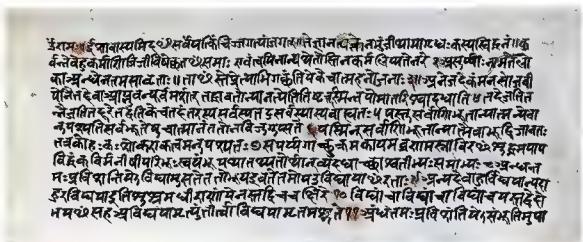


City of Kushinagar in the 5th century BCE according to a 1st-century BCE frieze in Sanchi Stupa 1 Southern Gate

The period between 800 and 200 BCE saw the formation of the Śramaṇa movement, from which Jainism and Buddhism originated. The first Upanishads were written during this period. After 500 BCE, the so-called "second urbanisation"^[note 1] started, with new urban settlements arising at the Ganges plain.^[77] The foundations for the "second urbanisation" were laid prior to 600 BCE, in the Painted Grey Ware culture of the Ghaggar-Hakra and Upper Ganges Plain; although most PGW sites were small farming villages, "several dozen" PGW sites eventually emerged as relatively large settlements that can be characterised as towns, the largest of which were fortified by ditches or moats and embankments made of piled earth with wooden palisades.^[78]

The Central Ganges Plain, where Magadha gained prominence, forming the base of the Maurya Empire, was a distinct cultural area,^[79] with new states arising after 500 BCE.^{[80][81]} It was influenced by the Vedic culture,^[82] but differed markedly from the Kuru-Panchala region.^[83] It "was the area of the earliest known cultivation of rice in South Asia and by 1800 BCE was the location of an advanced Neolithic population associated with the sites of Chirand and Chechar".^[84] In this region, the Śramaṇic movements flourished, and Jainism and Buddhism originated.^[74]

Upanishads and Śramaṇa movements



A page of *Isha Upanishad* manuscript.



Mahavira, the 24th **Gautama Buddha's** cremation
and last stupa, **Kushinagar**
Tirthankara of (Kushinara).
Jainism.

The time between 800 BCE and 400 BCE witnessed the composition of the earliest *Upanishads*,^{[85][86][87]} which form the theoretical basis of **classical Hinduism**, and are also known as the *Vedanta* (conclusion of the *Vedas*).^[88]

The increasing urbanisation of India in the 7th and 6th centuries BCE led to the rise of new ascetic or "Śramaṇa movements" which challenged the orthodoxy of rituals.^[85] **Mahavira** (c. 599–527 BCE), proponent of **Jainism**, and **Gautama Buddha** (c. 563–483 BCE), founder of **Buddhism**, were the most prominent icons of this movement. Śramaṇa gave rise to the concept of the cycle of birth and death, the concept of **samsara**, and the concept of liberation.^[89] Buddha found a **Middle Way** that ameliorated the extreme **asceticism** found in the *Śramaṇa* religions.^[90]

Around the same time, **Mahavira** (the 24th *Tirthankara* in Jainism) propagated a theology that was to later become Jainism.^[91] However, Jain orthodoxy believes the teachings of the *Tirthankaras* predates all known time and scholars believe **Parshvanatha** (c. 872 – c. 772 BCE), accorded status as the 23rd *Tirthankara*, was a historical figure. The *Vedas* are believed to have documented a few *Tirthankaras* and an ascetic order similar to the Śramaṇa movement.^[92]

Mahajanapadas



The [Mahajanapadas](#) were sixteen powerful polities located mainly within the [Indo-Gangetic Plain](#)

The period from c. 600 BCE to c. 300 BCE featured the rise of the [Mahajanapadas](#), sixteen powerful [kingdoms](#) and [oligarchic republics](#) in a belt stretching from [Gandhara](#) in the north-west to [Bengal](#) in the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent—including parts of the trans-Vindhyan region.^[93] Ancient Buddhist texts, like the [Ānguttara Nikāya](#),^[94] make frequent reference to these sixteen great kingdoms and republics—[Anga](#), [Assaka](#), [Avanti](#), [Chedi](#), [Gandhara](#), [Kashi](#), [Kamboja](#), [Kosala](#), [Kuru](#), [Magadha](#), [Malla](#), [Matsya](#) (or [Machcha](#)), [Panchala](#), [Surasena](#), [Vṛji](#), and [Vatsa](#). This period saw the second major rise of urbanism in India after the [Indus Valley Civilisation](#).^[95]



[Hindush](#) warrior, on the [Tomb of Xerxes I](#), circa 480 BCE.

Early "republics" or *ganasaṅgha*,^[96] such as *Shakyas*, *Koliyas*, *Mallakas*, and *Licchavis* had republican governments. *Ganasaṅghas*,^[96] such as the *Mallakas*, centered in the city of *Kusinagara*, and the *Vajjika League*, centred in the city of *Vaishali*, existed as early as the 6th century BCE and persisted in some areas until the 4th century CE.^[97] The most famous clan amongst the ruling confederate clans of the *Vajji Mahajanapada* were the *Licchavis*.^[98]

This period corresponds in an archaeological context to the *Northern Black Polished Ware* culture. Especially focused in the Central Ganges plain but also spreading across vast areas of the northern and central Indian subcontinent, this culture is characterised by the emergence of large cities with massive fortifications, significant population growth, increased social stratification, wide-ranging trade networks, construction of public architecture and water channels, specialised craft industries, a system of weights, *punch-marked coins*, and the introduction of writing in the form of *Brahmi* and *Kharosthi* scripts.^{[99][100]} The language of the gentry at that time was *Sanskrit*, while the languages of the general population of northern India are referred to as *Prakrits*.

Many of the sixteen kingdoms had merged into four major ones by the time of *Gautama Buddha*. These four were *Vatsa*, *Avanti*, *Kosala*, and *Magadha*.^[95]

Early Magadha dynasties



Magadha state c. 600 BCE, which is later expanded from its capital *Rajagriha* – under the *Haryanka dynasty* and the later *Shishunaga dynasty*.

Magadha formed one of the sixteen *Mahajanapadas* (Sanskrit: "Great Realms") or *kingdoms in ancient India*. The core of the kingdom was the area of Bihar south of the *Ganges*; its first capital was *Rajagriha* (modern Rajgir) then *Pataliputra* (modern Patna). Magadha expanded to include most of Bihar and Bengal with the conquest of *Licchavi* and *Anga* respectively,^[101] followed by much of eastern Uttar Pradesh and Orissa. The ancient kingdom of Magadha is heavily mentioned in Jain and Buddhist texts. It is also mentioned in the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Puranas*.^[102] The earliest reference to the Magadha people occurs in the *Atharva-Veda* where they are found listed along with the *Angas*, *Gandharis*, and *Mujavats*. Magadha played an important role in the development of *Jainism* and *Buddhism*. Republican communities (such as

the community of Rajakumara) are merged into Magadha kingdom. Villages had their own assemblies under their local chiefs called Gramakas. Their administrations were divided into executive, judicial, and military functions.

Early sources, from the Buddhist *Pāli Canon*, the Jain *Agamas* and the Hindu *Puranas*, mention Magadha being ruled by the *Pradyota dynasty* and *Haryanka dynasty* (c. 544–413 BCE) for some 200 years, c. 600–413 BCE. King *Bimbisara* of the *Haryanka dynasty* led an active and expansive policy, conquering Anga in what is now eastern Bihar and *West Bengal*. King Bimbisara was overthrown and killed by his son, Prince *Ajatashatru*, who continued the expansionist policy of Magadha. During this period, *Gautama Buddha*, the founder of Buddhism, lived much of his life in the Magadha kingdom. He attained enlightenment in *Bodh Gaya*, gave his first sermon in *Sarnath* and the *first Buddhist council* was held in *Rajgriha*.^[103] The *Haryanka dynasty* was overthrown by the *Shaishunaga dynasty* (c. 413–345 BCE). The last Shishunaga ruler, *Kalasoka*, was assassinated by *Mahapadma Nanda* in 345 BCE, the first of the so-called Nine Nandas (Mahapadma Nanda and his eight sons).

Nanda Empire and Alexander's campaign

The *Nanda Empire* (c. 345–322 BCE), at its peak, extended from Bengal in the east, to the *Punjab* in the west and as far south as the *Vindhya Range*.^[104] The *Nanda dynasty* built on the foundations laid by their *Haryanka* and *Shishunaga* predecessors.^[105] Nanda empire have built a vast army, consisting of 200,000 *infantry*, 20,000 *cavalry*, 2,000 war *chariots* and 3,000 war *elephants* (at the lowest estimates).^{[106][107]}

Maurya Empire



Maurya Empire at its peak under Ashoka the Great.

Ashokan pillar at Vaishali, 3rd century BCE.

The Maurya Empire (322–185 BCE) unified most of the Indian subcontinent into one state, and was the *largest empire* ever to exist on the Indian subcontinent.^[108] At its greatest extent, the Mauryan Empire stretched to the north up to the natural boundaries of the *Himalayas* and to the east into what is now *Assam*. To the west, it reached beyond modern Pakistan, to the *Hindu Kush* mountains in what is now Afghanistan. The empire was established by *Chandragupta Maurya*

assisted by Chanakya (Kautilya) in Magadha (in modern Bihar) when he overthrew the Nanda Empire.^[109]

Chandragupta rapidly expanded his power westwards across central and western India, and by 317 BCE the empire had fully occupied north-western India. The Mauryan Empire defeated Seleucus I, founder of the Seleucid Empire, during the Seleucid–Mauryan war, thus gained additional territory west of the Indus River. Chandragupta's son Bindusara succeeded to the throne around 297 BCE. By the time he died in c. 272 BCE, a large part of the Indian subcontinent was under Mauryan suzerainty. However, the region of Kalinga (around modern day Odisha) remained outside Mauryan control, perhaps interfering with trade with the south.^[110]



The Mauryan carved door of Lomas Rishi, one of the Barabar Caves, c. 250 BCE

Bindusara was succeeded by Ashoka, whose reign lasted until his death in about 232 BCE.^[111] His campaign against the Kalingans in about 260 BCE, though successful, led to immense loss of life and misery. This led Ashoka to shun violence, and subsequently to embrace Buddhism.^[110] The empire began to decline after his death and the last Mauryan ruler, Brihadratha, was assassinated by Pushyamitra Shunga to establish the Shunga Empire.^[111]

Under Chandragupta Maurya and his successors, internal and external trade, agriculture, and economic activities all thrived and expanded across India thanks to the creation of a single efficient system of finance, administration, and security. The Mauryans built the Grand Trunk Road, one of Asia's oldest and longest major roads connecting the Indian subcontinent with Central Asia.^[112] After the Kalinga War, the Empire experienced nearly half a century of peace and security under Ashoka. Mauryan India also enjoyed an era of social harmony, religious transformation, and expansion of scientific knowledge. Chandragupta Maurya's embrace of Jainism increased social and religious renewal and reform across his society, while Ashoka's embrace of Buddhism has been said to have been the foundation of the reign of social and political peace and non-violence across India. Ashoka sponsored Buddhist missions across the Indo-Mediterranean, into Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, West Asia, North Africa, and Mediterranean Europe.^[113]

The [Arthashastra](#) written by [Chanakya](#) and the [Edicts of Ashoka](#) are the primary written records of the Mauryan times. Archaeologically, this period falls in the era of [Northern Black Polished Ware](#). The Mauryan Empire was based on a modern and efficient economy and society in which the sale of merchandise was closely regulated by the government.^[114] Although there was no banking in the Mauryan society, [usury](#) was customary. A significant amount of written records on slavery are found, suggesting a prevalence thereof.^[115] During this period, a high-quality steel called [Wootz steel](#) was developed in south India and was later exported to China and Arabia.^[116]

Sangam period



Tamilakam, located at the tip of South India during the Sangam period, ruled by Chera dynasty, Chola dynasty and the Pandyan dynasty.

Ilango Adigal, author of [Silappatikaram](#), one of the five great epics of Tamil literature.^[117]

During the Sangam period [Tamil](#) literature flourished from the 3rd century BCE to the 4th century CE. Three Tamil dynasties, collectively known as the [Three Crowned Kings of Tamilakam](#): Chera dynasty, Chola dynasty, and the Pandya dynasty ruled parts of southern India.^[118]

The Sangam literature deals with the history, politics, wars, and culture of the Tamil people of this period.^[119] Unlike Sanskrit writers who were mostly Brahmins, Sangam writers came from diverse classes and social backgrounds and were mostly non-Brahmins.^[120]

Around c. 300 BCE – c. 200 CE, [Pathupattu](#), an anthology of ten mid-length book collections, which is considered part of [Sangam Literature](#), were composed; the composition of eight anthologies of poetic works [Ettuthogai](#) as well as the composition of eighteen minor poetic works [Patinenkilkanakku](#); while [Tolkappiyam](#), the earliest grammarian work in the [Tamil](#) language was developed.^[121] Also, during Sangam period, two of the [Five Great Epics of Tamil Literature](#) were composed. Ilango Adigal composed [Silappatikaram](#), which is a non-religious work, that revolves around Kannagi,^[122] and [Manimekalai](#), composed by Chithalai Chathanar, is a sequel to [Silappatikaram](#), and tells the story of the daughter of Kovalan and Madhavi, who became a Buddhist Bhikkhuni.^{[123][124]}

Classical period (c. 200 BCE – 650 CE)



[Ancient India during the rise of the Shunga Empire from the North, Satavahana dynasty from the Deccan, and Pandyan dynasty and Chola dynasty from the southern part of India.](#)



[Great Chaitya in the Karla Caves.](#) The shrines were developed over the period from the 2nd century BCE to the 5th century CE.



[Udayagiri and Khandagiri Caves](#) is home to the [Hathigumpha inscription](#), which was inscribed under [Kharavela](#), then Emperor of Kalinga of the [Mahameghavahana dynasty](#).



[Relief of a multi-storied temple, 2nd century CE, Ghantasala Stupa.](#) [\[125\]](#)[\[126\]](#)

The time between the Maurya Empire in the 3rd century BCE and the end of the Gupta Empire in the 6th century CE is referred to as the "Classical" period of India. [\[127\]](#) The [Gupta Empire](#) (4th–6th century) is regarded as the [Golden Age of India](#), although a host of kingdoms ruled over India in these centuries. Also, the [Sangam literature](#) flourished from the 3rd century BCE to the 3rd century CE in southern India. [\[128\]](#) During this period, [India's economy](#) is estimated to have been the largest in the world, having between one-third and one-quarter of the world's wealth, from 1 CE to 1000 CE. [\[129\]](#)[\[130\]](#)

Early classical period (c. 200 BCE – 320 CE)

Shunga Empire



The Shungas originated from [Magadha](#), and controlled large areas of the central and eastern Indian subcontinent from around 187 to 78 BCE. The dynasty was established by [Pushyamitra Shunga](#), who overthrew the last [Maurya emperor](#). Its capital was [Pataliputra](#), but later emperors, such as [Bhagabhadra](#), also held court at [Vidisha](#), modern [Besnagar](#).^[131]

Pushyamitra Shunga ruled for 36 years and was succeeded by his son [Agnimitra](#). There were ten Shunga rulers. However, after the death of Agnimitra, the empire rapidly disintegrated;^[132] inscriptions and coins indicate that much of northern and central India consisted of small kingdoms and city-states that were independent of any Shunga hegemony.^[133] The empire is noted for its numerous wars with both foreign and indigenous powers. They fought with the [Mahameghavahana dynasty of Kalinga](#), [Satavahana dynasty of Deccan](#), the [Indo-Greeks](#), and possibly the [Panchalas](#) and [Mitrzas of Mathura](#).

Art, education, philosophy, and other forms of learning flowered during this period including architectural monuments such as the Stupa at [Bharhut](#) and the renowned Great Stupa at [Sanchi](#). The Shunga rulers helped to establish the tradition of royal sponsorship of learning and art. The script used by the empire was a variant of [Brahmi](#) and was used to write the [Sanskrit language](#). The Shunga Empire played an imperative role in patronising [Indian culture](#) at a time when some of the most important developments in Hindu thought were taking place.

Satavahana Empire



Sanchi Stupa Two and Southern Gateway, 1st century CE (UNESCO World Heritage Site).

Indian ship on lead coin of Vasishthiputra Sri Pulamavi, testimony to the naval, seafaring and trading capabilities of the Sātavāhanas during the 1st–2nd century CE.

The Sātavāhanas were based from Amaravati in Andhra Pradesh as well as Junnar (Pune) and Prathisthan (Paithan) in Maharashtra. The territory of the empire covered large parts of India from the 1st century BCE onward. The Sātavāhanas started out as feudatories to the Mauryan dynasty, but declared independence with its decline.

The Sātavāhanas are known for their patronage of Hinduism and Buddhism, which resulted in Buddhist monuments from Ellora (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) to Amaravati. They were one of the first Indian states to issue coins with their rulers embossed. They formed a cultural bridge and played a vital role in trade as well as the transfer of ideas and culture to and from the Indo-Gangetic Plain to the southern tip of India.

They had to compete with the Shunga Empire and then the Kanva dynasty of Magadha to establish their rule. Later, they played a crucial role to protect large part of India against foreign invaders like the Sakas, Yavanas and Pahlavas. In particular, their struggles with the Western Kshatrapas went on for a long time. The notable rulers of the Satavahana Dynasty Gautamiputra Satakarni and Sri Yajna Satakarni were able to defeat the foreign invaders like the Western Kshatrapas and to stop their expansion. In the 3rd century CE, the empire was split into smaller states.^[134]

Trade and travels to India



Silk Road and Spice trade, ancient trade routes that linked India with the Old World; carried goods and ideas between the ancient civilisations of the Old World and India. The land routes are marked as red, and the water routes are marked as blue.

The spice trade in Kerala attracted traders from all over the Old World to India. India's Southwest coastal port Muziris had established itself as a major spice trade centre from as early as 3,000 BCE, according to Sumerian records. Jewish traders arrived in Kochi, Kerala, India as early

as 562 BCE.^[135] The Greco-Roman world followed by trading along the incense route and the Roman-India routes.^[136] During the 2nd century BCE Greek and Indian ships met to trade at Arabian ports such as Aden.^[137] During the first millennium, the sea routes to India were controlled by the Indians and Ethiopians that became the maritime trading power of the Red Sea.

Indian merchants involved in spice trade took Indian cuisine to Southeast Asia, where spice mixtures and curries became popular with the native inhabitants.^[138] Buddhism entered China through the Silk Road in the 1st or 2nd century CE.^[139] Hindu and Buddhist religious establishments of South and Southeast Asia came to be centres of production and commerce as they accumulated capital donated by patrons. They engaged in estate management, craftsmanship, and trade. Buddhism in particular travelled alongside the maritime trade, promoting literacy, art, and the use of coinage.^[140]

Kushan Empire



Kushan territories (full line) and Depiction of the maximum extent of Kushan dominions under Kanishka (dotted line), according to the Rabatak inscription

Buddha in Kanishka's coinage, Mathura art, 2nd century CE

The Kushan Empire expanded out of what is now Afghanistan into the northwest of the Indian subcontinent under the leadership of their first emperor, Kujula Kadphises, about the middle of the 1st century CE. The Kushans were possibly a Tocharian speaking tribe,^[141] one of five branches of the Yuezhi confederation.^{[142][143]} By the time of his grandson, Kanishka the Great, the empire spread to encompass much of Afghanistan,^[144] and then the northern parts of the Indian subcontinent.^[145]

Emperor Kanishka was a great patron of Buddhism; however, as Kushans expanded southward, the deities of their later coinage came to reflect its new Hindu majority.^{[146][147]} Historian Vincent Smith said about Kanishka:

He played the part of a second Ashoka in the history of Buddhism.^[148]

The empire linked the Indian Ocean maritime trade with the commerce of the [Silk Road](#) through the Indus valley, encouraging long-distance trade, particularly between China and [Rome](#). The Kushans brought new trends to the budding and blossoming [Gandhara art](#) and [Mathura art](#), which reached its peak during Kushan rule. ^[149] The period of peace under Kushan rule is known as [Pax Kushana](#). By the 3rd century, their empire in India was disintegrating and their last known great emperor was [Vasudeva I](#). ^{[150][151]}

Classical period (c. 320 – 650 CE)

Gupta Empire



[Gupta Empire](#) around 420 CE at its Current structure of the peak territorial extent under [Kumaragupta I](#).

[Mahabodhi Temple](#) built during the Gupta era, 5th century CE. The location are marked where the Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment.

The Gupta period was noted for cultural creativity, especially in literature, architecture, sculpture, and painting. ^[152] The Gupta period produced scholars such as [Kalidasa](#), [Aryabhata](#), [Varahamihira](#), [Vishnu Sharma](#), and [Vatsyayana](#). The Gupta period marked a watershed of Indian culture: the Guptas performed Vedic sacrifices to legitimise their rule, but they also patronised Buddhism, an alternative to Brahmanical orthodoxy. The military exploits of the first three rulers – [Chandragupta I](#), [Samudragupta](#), and [Chandragupta II](#) – brought much of India under their leadership. ^[153] Science and political administration reached new heights during the Gupta era. Strong trade ties also made the region an important cultural centre and established it as a base that would influence nearby kingdoms and regions. ^{[154][155]} The period of peace under Gupta rule is known as [Pax Gupta](#).

The latter Guptas successfully resisted the northwestern kingdoms until the arrival of the [Alchon Huns](#), who established themselves in Afghanistan by the first half of the 5th century CE, with

their capital at Bamiyan.^[156] However, much of the southern India including Deccan were largely unaffected by these events.^{[157][158]}

Vakataka Empire

The Vākāṭaka Empire originated from the Deccan in the mid-third century CE. Their state is believed to have extended from the southern edges of Malwa and Gujarat in the north to the Tungabhadra River in the south as well as from the Arabian Sea in the western to the edges of Chhattisgarh in the east. They were the most important successors of the Satavahanas in the Deccan, contemporaneous with the Guptas in northern India and succeeded by the Vishnukundina dynasty.

The Vakatakas are noted for having been patrons of the arts, architecture and literature. The rock-cut Buddhist viharas and chaityas of Ajanta Caves (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) were built under the patronage of Vakataka emperor, Harishena.^{[159][160]}



Ajanta Caves, 30 rock-cut Buddhist cave monument built under the Vakatakas.

Buddhist monks praying in front of the Dagoba of Chaitya Cave 26 of the Ajanta Caves.

Buddhist "Chaitya Griha" or prayer hall, with a seated Buddha, Cave 26 of the Ajanta Caves.



Many foreign ambassadors, representatives, and travelers are included as devotees attending the Buddha's

descent from Trayastrimsa
Heaven; painting from Cave 17
of the Ajanta Caves.

Kamarupa Kingdom



Copper Plate Seal of
Kamarupa Kings at
[Madan Kamdev](#)
ruins.

Samudragupta's 4th-century [Allahabad pillar inscription](#) mentions Kamarupa (Western Assam)^[161] and Davaka (Central Assam)^[162] as frontier kingdoms of the Gupta Empire. Davaka was later absorbed by Kamarupa, which grew into a large kingdom that spanned from Karatoya river to near present [Sadiya](#) and covered the entire Brahmaputra valley, [North Bengal](#), parts of [Bangladesh](#) and, at times [Purnea](#) and parts of [West Bengal](#).^[163]

Ruled by three dynasties [Varmanas](#) (c. 350–650 CE), [Mlechchha dynasty](#) (c. 655–900 CE) and [Kamarupa-Palas](#) (c. 900–1100 CE), from their capitals in present-day [Guwahati \(Pragjyotishpura\)](#), [Tezpur \(Haruppeswara\)](#) and [North Gauhati \(Durjaya\)](#) respectively. All three dynasties claimed their descent from [Narakasura](#). In the reign of the Varman king, [Bhaskar Varman](#) (c. 600–650 CE), the Chinese traveller [Xuanzang](#) visited the [region](#) and recorded his travels. Later, after weakening and disintegration (after the Kamarupa-Palas), the Kamarupa tradition was somewhat extended until c. 1255 CE by the [Lunar I](#) (c. 1120–1185 CE) and [Lunar II](#) (c. 1155–1255 CE) dynasties.^[164] The Kamarupa kingdom came to an end in the middle of the 13th century when the [Khen dynasty](#) under [Sandhya](#) of Kamarupanagara (North Guwahati), moved his capital to [Kamatapur \(North Bengal\)](#) after the invasion of Muslim Turks, and established the [Kamata kingdom](#).^[165]

Pallava Empire



Shore Temple (UNESCO World Heritage Site) at Mahabalipuram built by Narasimhavarman II.

The [Pallavas](#), during the 4th to 9th centuries were, alongside the [Guptas of the North](#), great patronisers of Sanskrit development in the [South](#) of the Indian subcontinent. The Pallava reign saw the first Sanskrit inscriptions in a script called [Grantha](#).^[166] Early Pallavas had different connexions to [Southeast Asian](#) countries. The Pallavas used Dravidian architecture to build some very important Hindu temples and academies in [Mamallapuram](#), [Kanchipuram](#) and other places; their rule saw the rise of great poets. The practice of dedicating temples to different deities came into vogue followed by fine artistic [temple architecture](#) and sculpture style of [Vastu Shastra](#).^[167]

Pallavas reached the height of power during the reign of [Mahendravarman I](#) (571–630 CE) and [Narasimhavarman I](#) (630–668 CE) and dominated the [Telugu](#) and northern parts of the [Tamil](#) region until the end of the 9th century.^[168]

Kadamba Empire



Kadamba shikara (tower) with Kalasa (pinnacle) on top, [Doddagaddavalli](#).

Kadambas originated from [Karnataka](#), was founded by Mayurasharma in 345 CE which at later times showed the potential of developing into imperial proportions. King Mayurasharma defeated the armies of [Pallavas of Kanchi](#) possibly with help of some native tribes. The Kadamba fame reached its peak during the rule of [Kakusthavarma](#), a notable ruler with whom the kings of [Gupta Dynasty](#) of northern India cultivated marital alliances. The Kadambas were contemporaries of the [Western Ganga Dynasty](#) and together they formed the earliest native kingdoms to rule the land with absolute autonomy. The dynasty later continued to rule as a feudatory of larger Kannada empires, the [Chalukya](#) and the [Rashtrakuta](#) empires, for over five hundred years during which time they branched into minor dynasties ([Kadambas of Goa](#), [Kadambas of Halasi](#) and [Kadambas of Hangal](#)).

Empire of Harsha

Harsha ruled northern India from 606 to 647 CE. He was the son of [Prabhakarvardhana](#) and the younger brother of [Rajyavardhana](#), who were members of the [Vardhana dynasty](#) and ruled [Thanesar](#), in present-day [Haryana](#).



Coin of Emperor Harsha, c. 606–647 CE.^[169]

After the downfall of the prior [Gupta Empire](#) in the middle of the 6th century, [North India](#) reverted to smaller republics and monarchical states. The power vacuum resulted in the rise of the Vardhanas of Thanesar, who began uniting the republics and monarchies from the Punjab to central India. After the death of Harsha's father and brother, representatives of the empire crowned Harsha emperor in April 606 CE, giving him the title of Maharaja.^[170] At the peak, his Empire covered much of North and Northwestern India, extended East until [Kamarupa](#), and South

until Narmada River; and eventually made Kannauj (in present Uttar Pradesh) his capital, and ruled until 647 CE.^[171]

The peace and prosperity that prevailed made his court a centre of cosmopolitanism, attracting scholars, artists and religious visitors.^[171] During this time, Harsha converted to Buddhism from Surya worship.^[172] The Chinese traveller Xuanzang visited the court of Harsha and wrote a very favourable account of him, praising his justice and generosity.^[171] His biography *Harshacharita* ("Deeds of Harsha") written by Sanskrit poet Banabhatta, describes his association with Thanesar and the palace with a two-storied *Dhavalagriha* (White Mansion).^{[173][174]}

Early medieval period (c. 650 – 1200)

Early medieval India began after the end of the Gupta Empire in the 6th century CE.^[127] This period also covers the "Late Classical Age" of Hinduism, which began after the collapse of the Empire of Harsha in the 7th century,^[175] and ended in the 13th century with the rise of the Delhi Sultanate in Northern India;^[176] the beginning of Imperial Kannauj, leading to the Tripartite struggle; and the end of the Later Cholas with the death of Rajendra Chola III in 1279 in Southern India; however some aspects of the Classical period continued until the fall of the Vijayanagara Empire in the south around the 17th century.

From the fifth century to the thirteenth, Śrauta sacrifices declined, and support for Shaivism, Vaishnavism and Shaktism expanded in royal courts, while the support for Buddhism declined.^[177] Lack of appeal among the rural masses, who instead embraced Brahmanical Hinduism formed in the Hindu synthesis, and dwindling financial support from trading communities and royal elites, were major factors in the decline of Buddhism.^[178]

In the 7th century, Kumārila Bhaṭṭa formulated his school of Mimamsa philosophy and defended the position on Vedic rituals.^[179]

From the 8th to the 10th century, three dynasties contested for control of northern India: the Gurjara Pratiharas of Malwa, the Palas of Bengal, and the Rashtrakutas of the Deccan. The Sena dynasty would later assume control of the Pala Empire; the Gurjara Pratiharas fragmented into various states, notably the Kingdom of Malwa, the Kingdom of Bundelkhand, the Kingdom of Dahala, the Tomaras of Haryana, and the Kingdom of Sambhar, these states were some of the earliest Rajput kingdoms;^[180] while the Rashtrakutas were annexed by the Western Chalukyas.^[181] During this period, the Chaulukya dynasty emerged; the Chaulukyas constructed the Dilwara Temples, Modhera Sun Temple, Rani ki vav^[182] in the style of Māru-Gurjara architecture, and their capital Anhilwara (modern Patan, Gujarat) was one of the largest cities in the Indian subcontinent, with the population estimated at 100,000 in c. 1000.

The [Chola Empire](#) emerged as a major power during the reign of [Raja Raja Chola I](#) and [Rajendra Chola I](#) who successfully invaded parts of Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka in the 11th century.^[183] [Lalitaditya Muktagi](#) (r. 724–760) was an emperor of the Kashmiri [Karkota dynasty](#), which exercised influence in northwestern India from 625 until 1003, and was followed by [Lohara dynasty](#). [Kalhana](#) in his [Rajatarangini](#) credits king Lalitaditya with leading an aggressive military campaign in Northern India and Central Asia.^{[184][185][186]}

The [Hindu Shahi](#) dynasty ruled portions of eastern Afghanistan, northern Pakistan, and Kashmir from the mid-7th century to the early 11th century. While in Odisha, the [Eastern Ganga Empire](#) rose to power; noted for the advancement of [Hindu architecture](#), most notable being [Jagannath Temple](#) and [Konark Sun Temple](#), as well as being patrons of art and literature.



[Martand Sun Temple](#) Central shrine, dedicated to the deity [Surya](#), and built by the third ruler of the [Karkota dynasty](#), [Lalitaditya Muktagi](#), in the 8th century



[Konark Sun Temple](#) at Konark, Orissa, built by [Narasimhadeva I](#) (1238–1264) of the Eastern Ganga dynasty



[Kandariya Mahadeva Temple](#) in the [Khajuraho complex](#) was built by the [Chandelas](#)



[Jagannath Temple](#) at Puri, built by [Anantavarman Chodaganga Deva](#) of the Eastern Ganga dynasty

Later Gupta dynasty



Map of the Later Guptas

The Later Gupta dynasty ruled the [Magadha](#) region in eastern India between the 6th and 7th centuries AD. The Later Guptas succeeded the [imperial Guptas](#) as the rulers of Magadha, but there is no evidence connecting the two dynasties; these appear to be two distinct families. ^[187] The Later Guptas are so-called because the names of their rulers ended with the suffix "-gupta", which they might have adopted to portray themselves as the legitimate successors of the imperial Guptas. ^[188]

Chalukya Empire

The [Chalukya Empire](#) ruled large parts of southern and [central India](#) between the 6th and the 12th centuries, as three related yet individual dynasties. The earliest dynasty, known as the "Badami Chalukyas", ruled from Vatapi (modern [Badami](#)) from the middle of the 6th century. The Badami Chalukyas began to assert their independence at the decline of the [Kadamba](#) kingdom of [Banavasi](#) and rapidly rose to prominence during the reign of [Pulakeshin II](#). The rule of the Chalukyas marks an important milestone in the history of South India and a golden age in the history of [Karnataka](#). The political atmosphere in South India shifted from smaller kingdoms to large empires with the ascendancy of Badami Chalukyas. A Southern India-based kingdom took control and consolidated the entire region between the [Kaveri](#) and the [Narmada](#) Rivers. The rise of this empire saw the birth of efficient administration, overseas trade and commerce and the development of new style of architecture called "Chalukyan architecture". The Chalukya dynasty ruled parts of southern and central India from Badami in Karnataka between 550 and 750, and then again from [Kalyani](#) between 970 and 1190.



Galaganatha Temple at Pattadakal complex (UNESCO World Heritage) is an example of Badami Chalukya architecture



Bhutanatha temple complex at Badami, next to a waterfall, during the monsoon.



Vishnu image inside the Badami Cave Temple Complex. Example of Indian rock-cut architecture



8th century Durga temple exterior view at Aihole complex. It includes Hindu, Buddhist and Jain temples and monuments

Rashtrakuta Empire

Founded by Dantidurga around 753,^[189] the Rashtrakuta Empire ruled from its capital at Manyakheta for almost two centuries.^[190] At its peak, the Rashtrakutas ruled from the Ganges-Yamuna Doab in the north to Cape Comorin in the south, a fruitful time of architectural and literary achievements.^{[191][192]}

The early rulers of this dynasty were Hindu, but the later rulers were strongly influenced by Jainism.^[193] Govinda III and Amoghavarsha were the most famous of the long line of able administrators produced by the dynasty. Amoghavarsha was also an author and wrote *Kavirajamarga*, the earliest known Kannada work on poetics.^{[190][194]} Architecture reached a milestone in the Dravidian style, the finest example of which is seen in the Kailasanath Temple at

Ellora. Other important contributions are the Kashivishvanatha temple and the Jain Narayana temple at [Pattadakal](#) in Karnataka.

The Arab traveller Suleiman described the Rashtrakuta Empire as one of the four great Empires of the world.^[195] The Rashtrakuta period marked the beginning of the golden age of southern Indian mathematics. The great south Indian mathematician [Mahāvīra](#) had a huge impact on medieval south Indian mathematicians.^[196] The Rashtrakuta rulers also patronised men of letters in a variety of languages.^[190]



[Kailasa temple](#), is one of the largest [rock-cut](#) ancient [Hindu temples](#) located in [Ellora](#)



[Shikhara](#) of Indra Sabha at Ellora Caves



Statue of the [Buddha](#) seated. A part of the Carpenter's cave (Buddhist Cave 10).



[Jain Tirthankara Mahavira](#) with [Yaksha](#) Matanga and [Yakshi](#) Siddhaiki at Ellora Caves

Gurjara-Pratihara Empire

The Gurjara-Pratiharas were instrumental in containing Arab armies moving east of the Indus River. [Nagabhata I](#) defeated the Arab army under Junaid and Tamin during the [Umayyad](#) campaigns in India.^[197] Under [Nagabhata II](#), the Gurjara-Pratiharas became the most powerful dynasty in northern India. He was succeeded by his son [Ramabhadra](#), who ruled briefly before being succeeded by his son, [Mihira Bhoja](#). Under Bhoja and his successor [Mahendrapala I](#), the

Pratihara Empire reached its peak of prosperity and power. By the time of Mahendrapala, its territory stretched from the border of [Sindh](#) in the west to Bihar in the east and from the Himalayas in the north to around the [Narmada River](#) in the south.^[198] The expansion triggered a tripartite power struggle with the [Rashtrakuta](#) and [Pala](#) empires for control of the Indian subcontinent.

By the end of the 10th century, several feudatories of the empire took advantage of the temporary weakness of the Gurjara-Pratiharas to declare their independence, notably the [Kingdom of Malwa](#), the [Kingdom of Bundelkhand](#), the [Tomaras of Haryana](#), and the [Kingdom of Sambhar](#)^[199] and the [Kingdom of Dahala](#).



One of the four entrances of the [Teli ka Mandir](#), built by the Pratihara emperor [Mihira Bhoja](#).^[200]

Sculptures near Teli ka Mandir, [Gwalior Fort](#)

Jainism-related cave monuments and statues carved into the rock face inside [Siddhachal Caves](#), Gwalior Fort



Ghateshwara Mahadeva temple at [Baroli Temples complex](#). Complex of eight temples, built by the Gurjara-Pratiharas, within a walled enclosure

Gahadavala dynasty

Gahadavala dynasty ruled parts of the present-day Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, during 11th and 12th centuries. Their capital was located at [Varanasi](#).^[201]

Karnat dynasty



Pillar from the Karnat capital of [Simraungadh](#)

In 1097 AD, the Karnat dynasty of Mithila emerged on the Bihar/Nepal border area and maintained capitals in [Darbhanga](#) and [Simraongadh](#). The dynasty was established by [Nanyadeva](#), a military commander of Karnataka origin. Under this dynasty, the [Maithili](#) language started to develop with the first piece of Maithili literature, the [Varna Ratnakara](#) being produced in the 14th century by Jyotirishwar Thakur. The Karnats also carried out raids into [Nepal](#). They fell in 1324 following the invasion of [Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq](#).^{[202][203]}

Pala Empire



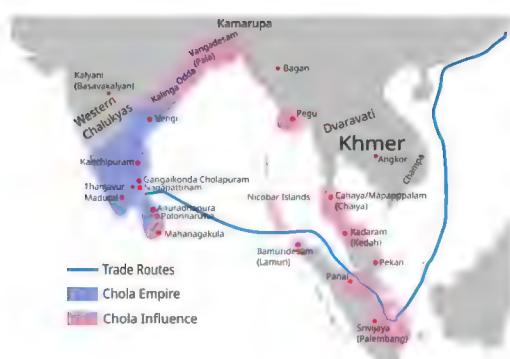
Excavated ruins of **Nalanda**, a centre of Buddhist learning from 450 to 1193

The Pala Empire was founded by Gopala I.^{[204][205][206]} It was ruled by a Buddhist dynasty from Bengal. The Palas reunified Bengal after the fall of Shashanka's Gauda Kingdom.^[207]

The Palas were followers of the [Mahayana](#) and [Tantric](#) schools of Buddhism,^[208] they also patronised [Shaivism](#) and [Vaishnavism](#).^[209] The empire reached its peak under [Dharmapala](#) and [Devapala](#). Dharmapala is believed to have conquered Kanauj and extended his sway up to the farthest limits of India in the north-west.^[209]

The Pala Empire can be considered as the golden era of Bengal.^[210] Dharmapala founded the [Vikramashila](#) and revived Nalanda,^[209] considered one of the first great universities in recorded history. Nalanda reached its height under the patronage of the Pala Empire.^{[210][211]} The Palas also built many [viharas](#). They maintained close cultural and commercial ties with countries of Southeast Asia and [Tibet](#). Sea trade added greatly to the prosperity of the Pala Empire.

Cholas



Chola Empire under Rajendra Chola, c. 1030

Medieval Cholas rose to prominence during the middle of the 9th century and established the greatest empire South India had seen. [212] They successfully united the South India under their rule and through their naval strength extended their influence in the Southeast Asian countries

such as Srivijaya.^[183] Under [Rajaraja Chola I](#) and his successors [Rajendra Chola I](#), [Rajadhiraja Chola](#), [Virarajendra Chola](#) and [Kulothunga Chola I](#) the dynasty became a military, economic and cultural power in South Asia and South-East Asia.^{[213][214]} Rajendra Chola I's navies occupied the sea coasts from Burma to Vietnam,^[215] the [Andaman and Nicobar Islands](#), the [Lakshadweep](#) (Laccadive) islands, [Sumatra](#), and the [Malay Peninsula](#). The power of the new empire was proclaimed to the eastern world by the expedition to the [Ganges](#) which Rajendra Chola I undertook and by the occupation of cities of the maritime empire of [Srivijaya](#) in Southeast Asia, as well as by the repeated embassies to China.^[216]

They dominated the political affairs of Sri Lanka for over two centuries through repeated invasions and occupation. They also had continuing trade contacts with the Arabs and the Chinese empire.^[217] Rajaraja Chola I and his son Rajendra Chola I gave political unity to the whole of Southern India and established the Chola Empire as a respected sea power.^[218] Under the Cholas, the South India reached new heights of excellence in art, religion and literature. In all of these spheres, the Chola period marked the culmination of movements that had begun in an earlier age under the Pallavas. Monumental architecture in the form of majestic temples and sculpture in stone and bronze reached a finesse never before achieved in India.^[219]



[Srirangam Ranganathaswamy Temple](#) is the world's largest functioning Hindu temple^[220] present in [Tamil Nadu, India](#)



The granite gopuram (tower) of [Brihadeeswarar Temple](#),



Chariot detail at [Airavatesvara Temple](#) built by [Rajaraja Chola](#)



The pyramidal structure above the sanctum at [Brihadisvara](#)



Brihadeeswara Temple
Entrance Gopurams at
[Thanjavur](#)

Western Chalukya Empire

The Western Chalukya Empire ruled most of the [western Deccan](#), South India, between the 10th and 12th centuries.^[221] Vast areas between the [Narmada River](#) in the north and [Kaveri River](#) in the south came under Chalukya control.^[221] During this period the other major ruling families of the Deccan, the [Hoysalas](#), the [Seuna Yadavas of Devagiri](#), the [Kakatiya dynasty](#) and the [Southern Kalachuris](#), were subordinates of the Western Chalukyas and gained their independence only when the power of the Chalukya waned during the latter half of the 12th century.^[222]

The Western Chalukyas developed an architectural style known today as a transitional style, an architectural link between the style of the early Chalukya dynasty and that of the later Hoysala empire. Most of its monuments are in the districts bordering the Tungabhadra River in central Karnataka. Well known examples are the [Kasivisvesvara Temple](#) at [Lakkundi](#), the [Mallikarjuna Temple](#) at [Kuruvatti](#), the [Kallesvara Temple](#) at [Bagali](#), [Siddhesvara Temple](#) at [Haveri](#), and the [Mahadeva Temple](#) at [Itagi](#).^[223] This was an important period in the development of fine arts in Southern India, especially in literature as the Western Chalukya kings encouraged writers in the native language of [Kannada](#), and Sanskrit like the philosopher and statesman [Basava](#) and the great mathematician [Bhāskara II](#).^{[224][225]}



Shrine outer wall and *Dravida* style superstructure (*shikhara*) at [Siddhesvara Temple at Haveri](#)



Ornate entrance to the closed hall from the south at [Kalleshvara Temple at Bagali](#)



Shrine wall relief, molding frieze and miniature decorative tower in [Mallikarjuna Temple at Kuruvatti](#)



Rear view showing lateral entrances of the [Mahadeva Temple at Itagi](#)

Late medieval period (c. 1200 – 1526)

The late medieval period is marked by repeated invasions by Muslim Central Asian nomadic clans, [\[226\]](#)[\[227\]](#) the rule of the Delhi Sultanate, and by the growth of other states, built upon military technology of the sultanate. [\[228\]](#)

Delhi Sultanate

The Delhi Sultanate was a series of successive Islamic states based in Delhi, ruled by several dynasties of varying origins. The polity ruled over large parts of the Indian subcontinent from the 13th to early 16th centuries. [\[229\]](#) The sultanate was founded in the 12th and 13th centuries by Central Asian Turks, who invaded parts of northern India and established the state atop former Hindu holdings. [\[230\]](#) The subsequent [Mamluk dynasty](#) of Delhi managed to conquer large areas of

northern India. The [Khalji dynasty](#) conquered much of central India while forcing the principal Hindu kingdoms of South India to become [vassal states](#).^[229]

The sultanate ushered in a period of Indian cultural renaissance. The resulting "Indo-Muslim" fusion of cultures left lasting syncretic monuments in architecture, music, literature, religion, and clothing. It is surmised that the language of [Urdu](#) was born during the period of the Delhi Sultanate. The sultanate was the only Indo-Islamic state to enthrone one of the few female rulers in India, [Razia Sultana](#) (r. 1236–1240).

While initially disruptive due to the passing of power from native Indian elites to Turkic Muslim elites, the Delhi Sultanate was responsible for integrating the Indian subcontinent into a growing world system, drawing India into a wider international network, which had a significant impact on Indian culture and society.^[231] However, the Delhi Sultanate also caused large-scale destruction and desecration of temples in the Indian subcontinent.^[232]

The [Mongol invasions of India](#) were successfully repelled by the Delhi Sultanate during the rule of [Alauddin Khalji](#). A major factor in their success was their Turkic [Mamluk](#) slave army, who were highly skilled in the same style of nomadic cavalry warfare as the Mongols. It is possible that the Mongol Empire may have expanded into India were it not for the Delhi Sultanate's role in repelling them.^[233] By repeatedly repulsing the Mongol raiders,^[234] the sultanate saved India from the devastation waged on West and Central Asia. Soldiers from that region and learned men and administrators fleeing Mongol invasions of Iran migrated into the subcontinent, thereby creating a syncretic Indo-Islamic culture in the north.^[233]

A Turco-Mongol conqueror from Central Asia, [Timur](#) (Tamerlane), attacked the reigning sultan [Nasir-u Din Mehmud](#) of the [Tughlaq dynasty](#) in Delhi.^[235] The sultan's army was defeated on 17 December 1398. Timur entered Delhi and the city was sacked, destroyed, and left in ruins after Timur's army had killed and plundered for three days and nights. He ordered the whole city to be sacked except for the [sayyids](#), scholars, and the "other Muslims" (artists); 100,000 war prisoners were said to have been put to death in one day.^[236] The sultanate suffered significantly from the sacking of Delhi. Though revived briefly under the [Sayyid](#) and [Lodi](#) dynasties, it was but a shadow of the former. Lodi rule lasted in Delhi until the defeat of the last sultan, [Ibrahim Khan Lodi](#), in 1526 to the forces of [Babur](#).^[237]



[Qutb Minar](#), a UNESCO World Heritage Site, whose construction was begun by [Qutb ud-Din Aibak](#), the first Sultan of Delhi.

[Dargahs of Sufi-saint Nizamuddin Auliya](#), and poet and musician [Amir Khusro](#) in Delhi.

Vijayanagara Empire



Map of the Sangama dynasty of the Vijayanagara Empire

The Vijayanagara Empire was established in 1336 by [Harihara I](#) and his brother [Bukka Raya I](#) of [Sangama Dynasty](#),^[238] which originated as a political heir of the [Hoysala Empire](#), [Kakatiya Empire](#),^[239] and the [Pandyan Empire](#).^[240] The empire rose to prominence as a culmination of attempts by the south Indian powers to ward off [Islamic invasions](#) by the end of the 13th century. It lasted until 1646, although its power declined after a major military defeat in 1565 by the combined armies of the [Deccan sultanates](#). The empire is named after its capital city of [Vijayanagara](#), whose ruins surround present day [Hampi](#), now a [World Heritage Site](#) in Karnataka, India.^[241]

In the first two decades after the founding of the empire, Harihara I gained control over most of the area south of the Tungabhadra river and earned the title of *Purvapaschima Samudradhishavara* ("master of the eastern and western seas"). By 1374 [Bukka Raya I](#), successor to Harihara I, had defeated the chiefdom of [Arcot](#), the [Reddys](#) of Kondavidu, and the [Sultan of](#)

Madurai and had gained control over [Goa](#) in the west and the Tungabhadra-Krishna [doab](#) in the north.^{[242][243]}

[Harihara II](#), the second son of [Bukka Raya I](#), further consolidated the kingdom beyond the [Krishna River](#) and brought the whole of South India under the [Vijayanagara](#) umbrella.^[244] The next ruler, [Deva Raya I](#), emerged successful against the [Gajapatis](#) of Odisha and undertook important works of fortification and irrigation.^[245] Italian traveller Niccolo de Conti wrote of him as the most powerful ruler of India.^[246] [Deva Raya II](#) succeeded to the throne in 1424 and was possibly the most capable of the [Sangama](#) Dynasty rulers.^[247] He quelled rebelling feudal lords as well as the [Zamorin](#) of [Calicut](#) and [Quilon](#) in the south. He invaded the island of Sri Lanka and became overlord of the kings of [Burma](#) at [Pegu](#) and [Tanasserim](#).^{[248][249][250]}

The [Vijayanagara](#) Emperors were tolerant of all religions and sects, as writings by foreign visitors show.^[251] The kings used titles such as *Gobrahamana Pratipalanacharya* (literally, "protector of cows and Brahmins") and *Hindurayasuratrana* (lit, "upholder of Hindu faith") that testified to their intention of protecting Hinduism and yet were at the same time staunchly Islamicate in their court ceremonials and dress.^[252] The empire's founders, Harihara I and [Bukka Raya I](#), were devout [Shaivas](#) (worshippers of [Shiva](#)), but made grants to the [Vaishnava](#) order of [Sringeri](#) with [Vidyaranya](#) as their patron saint, and designated [Varaha](#) (an [avatar](#) of Vishnu) as their emblem.^[253] Nobles from Central Asia's Timurid kingdoms also came to [Vijayanagara](#).^[254] The later [Saluva](#) and [Tuluva](#) kings were [Vaishnava](#) by faith, but worshipped at the feet of Lord [Virupaksha](#) ([Shiva](#)) at [Hampi](#) as well as Lord [Venkateshwara](#) (Vishnu) at [Tirupati](#).^[255] A Sanskrit work, *Jambavati Kalyanam* by King Krishnadevaraya, called Lord [Virupaksha](#) *Karnata Rajya Raksha Mani* ("protective jewel of Karnata Empire").^[256] The kings patronised the saints of the [dvaita](#) order (philosophy of dualism) of [Madhvacharya](#) at [Udupi](#).^[257]



Photograph of the ruins of the [Vijayanagara Empire](#) at [Hampi](#), now a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1868^[258]



Gajashaala, or elephant's stable, was built by the [Vijayanagar](#) rulers for their [war](#) elephants.^[259]



Vijayanagara marketplace at [Hampi](#), along with the sacred tank located on the side of [Krishna](#) temple.



Stone temple car in Vitthala
Temple at Hampi

The empire's legacy includes many monuments spread over South India, the best known of which is the group at Hampi. The previous temple building traditions in South India came together in the Vijayanagara Architecture style. The mingling of all faiths and vernaculars inspired architectural innovation of Hindu temple construction. South Indian mathematics flourished under the protection of the Vijayanagara Empire in Kerala. The south Indian mathematician [Madhava of Sangamagrama](#) founded the famous [Kerala School of Astronomy and Mathematics](#) in the 14th century which produced a lot of great south Indian mathematicians like [Parameshvara](#), [Nilakantha Somayaji](#) and [Jyeṣṭhadeva](#).^[260] Efficient administration and vigorous overseas trade brought new technologies such as water management systems for irrigation.^[261] The empire's patronage enabled fine arts and literature to reach new heights in Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, and Sanskrit, while Carnatic music evolved into its current form.^[262]

Vijayanagara went into decline after the defeat in the [Battle of Talikota](#) (1565). After the death of [Aliya Rama Raya](#) in the Battle of Talikota, [Tirumala Deva Raya](#) started the [Aravidu dynasty](#), moved and founded a new capital of Penukonda to replace the destroyed Hampi, and attempted to reconstitute the remains of Vijayanagara Empire.^[263] Tirumala abdicated in 1572, dividing the remains of his kingdom to his three sons, and pursued a religious life until his death in 1578. The Aravidu dynasty successors ruled the region but the empire collapsed in 1614, and the final remains ended in 1646, from continued wars with the Bijapur sultanate and others.^{[264][265][266]} During this period, more kingdoms in South India became independent and separate from Vijayanagara. These include the [Mysore Kingdom](#), [Keladi Nayaka](#), [Nayaks of Madurai](#), [Nayaks of Tanjore](#), [Nayakas of Chitradurga](#) and [Nayak Kingdom of Gingee](#) – all of which declared independence and went on to have a significant impact on the history of South India in the coming centuries.^[264]

Other kingdoms



[Vijaya Stambha \(Tower of Victory\).](#)



[Temple inside Chittorgarh fort](#)



[Man Singh \(Manasimha\) palace at the Gwalior fort](#)



[Chinese manuscript *Tribute Giraffe with Attendant*, depicting a giraffe presented by Bengali envoys in the name of Sultan Saifuddin Hamza Shah of Bengal to the Yongle Emperor of Ming China](#)



[Mahmud Gawan Madrasa was built by Mahmud Gawan, the Wazir of the Bahmani Sultanate as the centre of religious as well as secular education](#)

For two and a half centuries from the mid-13th century, politics in Northern India was dominated by the [Delhi Sultanate](#), and in Southern India by the Vijayanagar Empire. However, there were other regional powers present as well. After fall of Pala Empire, the [Chero dynasty](#) ruled much of [Eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar](#) and [Jharkhand](#) from the 12th to the 18th centuries.

[\[267\]\[268\]\[269\]](#) The [Reddy dynasty](#) successfully defeated the Delhi Sultanate and extended their rule from [Cuttack](#) in

the north to [Kanchi](#) in the south, eventually being absorbed into the expanding Vijayanagara Empire.^[270]

In the north, the [Rajput kingdoms](#) remained the dominant force in Western and Central India. The [Mewar dynasty](#) under [Maharana Hammir](#) defeated and captured [Muhammad Tughlaq](#) with the [Bargujars](#) as his main allies. Tughlaq had to pay a huge ransom and relinquish all of Mewar's lands. After this event, the Delhi Sultanate did not attack Chittor for a few hundred years. The Rajputs re-established their independence, and Rajput states were established as far east as [Bengal](#) and north into the [Punjab](#). The [Tomaras](#) established themselves at [Gwalior](#), and [Man Singh Tomar](#) reconstructed the [Gwalior Fort](#).^[271] During this period, Mewar emerged as the leading Rajput state; and [Rana Kumbha](#) expanded his kingdom at the expense of the [Sultanates of Malwa](#) and [Gujarat](#).^{[271][272]} The next great Rajput ruler, [Rana Sanga](#) of Mewar, became the principal player in [Northern India](#). His objectives grew in scope – he planned to conquer Delhi. But, his defeat in the [Battle of Khanwa](#) consolidated the new [Mughal dynasty](#) in India.^[271] The Mewar dynasty under [Maharana Udai Singh II](#) faced further defeat by Mughal emperor [Akbar](#), with their capital Chittor being captured. Due to this event, Udai Singh II founded [Udaipur](#), which became the new capital of the [Mewar kingdom](#). His son, [Maharana Pratap](#) of Mewar, firmly resisted the Mughals. Akbar sent many missions against him. He survived to ultimately gain control of all of Mewar, excluding the [Chittor Fort](#).^[273]

In the south, the [Bahmani Sultanate](#) in the Deccan, born from a [rebellion](#) in 1347 against the [Tughlaq dynasty](#),^[274] was the chief rival of Vijayanagara, and frequently created difficulties for them.^[275] Starting in 1490, the Bahmani Sultanate's governors revolted, their independent states composing the five [Deccan sultanates](#); [Ahmadnagar](#) declared independence, followed by [Bijapur](#) and [Berar](#) in the same year; [Golkonda](#) became independent in 1518 and [Bidar](#) in 1528.^[276] Although generally rivals, they allied against the Vijayanagara Empire in 1565, permanently weakening Vijayanagar in the [Battle of Talikota](#).^{[277][278]}

In the East, the [Gajapati Kingdom](#) remained a strong regional power to reckon with, associated with a high point in the growth of regional culture and architecture. Under [Kapilendradeva](#), Gajapatis became an empire stretching from the lower [Ganga](#) in the north to the [Kaveri](#) in the south.^[279] In [Northeast India](#), the [Ahom Kingdom](#) was a major power for six centuries;^{[280][281]} led by [Lachit Borphukan](#), the Ahoms decisively defeated the Mughal army at the [Battle of Saraighat](#) during the [Ahom-Mughal conflicts](#).^[282] Further east in Northeastern India was the [Kingdom of Manipur](#), which ruled from their seat of power at [Kangla Fort](#) and developed a sophisticated Hindu [Gaudiya Vaishnavite](#) culture.^{[283][284][285]}

The [Sultanate of Bengal](#) was the dominant power of the [Ganges–Brahmaputra Delta](#), with a network of mint towns spread across the region. It was a [Sunni Muslim](#) monarchy with Indo-Turkic, Arab, Abyssinian and [Bengali Muslim](#) elites. The sultanate was known for its religious pluralism where non-Muslim communities co-existed peacefully. The Bengal Sultanate had a

circle of vassal states, including [Odisha](#) in the southwest, [Arakan](#) in the southeast, and [Tripura](#) in the east. In the early 16th century, the Bengal Sultanate reached the peak of its territorial growth with control over [Kamrup](#) and [Kamata](#) in the northeast and [Jaunpur](#) and [Bihar](#) in the west. It was reputed as a thriving trading nation and one of Asia's strongest states. The Bengal Sultanate was described by contemporary European and Chinese visitors as a relatively prosperous kingdom and the "richest country to trade with". The Bengal Sultanate left a strong architectural legacy. Buildings from the period show foreign influences merged into a distinct [Bengali style](#). The Bengal Sultanate was also the largest and most prestigious authority among the independent medieval Muslim-ruled states in the [history of Bengal](#). Its decline began with an [interregnum](#) by the [Suri Empire](#), followed by [Mughal conquest](#) and disintegration into petty kingdoms.

Bhakti movement and Sikhism

The Bhakti movement refers to the [theistic](#) devotional trend that emerged in medieval Hinduism^[286] and later revolutionised in [Sikhism](#).^[287] It originated in the seventh-century south India (now parts of Tamil Nadu and Kerala), and spread northwards.^[286] It swept over east and north India from the 15th century onwards, reaching its zenith between the 15th and 17th century.^[288]

- The Bhakti movement regionally developed around different gods and goddesses, such as [Vaishnavism](#) (Vishnu), [Shaivism](#) (Shiva), [Shaktism](#) (Shakti goddesses), and [Smartism](#).^{[289][290][291]} The movement was inspired by many poet-saints, who championed a wide range of philosophical positions ranging from theistic [dualism](#) of [Dvaita](#) to absolute monism of [Advaita Vedanta](#).^{[292][293]}
- Sikhism is a [monotheistic](#) and [panentheistic](#) religion based on the spiritual teachings of [Guru Nanak](#), the first Guru,^[294] and the ten successive [Sikh gurus](#). After the death of the tenth Guru, [Guru Gobind Singh](#), the Sikh scripture, [Guru Granth Sahib](#), became the literal embodiment of the eternal, impersonal Guru, where the scripture's word serves as the spiritual guide for Sikhs.^{[295][296][297]}
- [Buddhism in India](#) flourished in the [Himalayan](#) kingdoms of [Namgyal Kingdom](#) in [Ladakh](#), [Sikkim Kingdom](#) in [Sikkim](#), and [Chutia Kingdom](#) in [Arunachal Pradesh](#) of the Late medieval period.



Rang Ghar, built by [Pramatta Singha](#) in [Ahom kingdom](#)'s capital [Rangpur](#), is one of the earliest pavilions of outdoor stadia in the Indian subcontinent



Chittor Fort is the largest fort on the Indian subcontinent; it is one of the six [Hill Forts of Rajasthan](#)



Ranakpur Jain temple was built in the 15th century with the support of the Rajput state of [Mewar](#)



Gol Gumbaz built by the [Bijapur Sultanate](#), has the second largest pre-modern dome in the world after the [Byzantine Hagia Sophia](#)

Early modern period (1526–1858)

The [early modern period](#) of Indian history is dated from 1526 to 1858, corresponding to the rise and fall of the [Mughal Empire](#), which inherited from the [Timurid Renaissance](#). During this age India's economy expanded, relative peace was maintained and arts were patronised. This period witnessed the further development of [Indo-Islamic architecture](#),^{[298][299]} the growth of [Marathas](#) and [Sikhs](#) enabled them to rule significant regions of India in the waning days of the Mughal empire.^[16] With the discovery of the [Cape route](#) in the 1500s, the first Europeans to arrive by sea and establish themselves, were the [Portuguese in Goa and Bombay](#).^[300]

Mughal Empire

Mughal Empire



Map of the [Mughal Empire](#) at its peak in year 1700



[Taj Mahal](#) is the jewel of Muslim architecture in India [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#) declaration, 1983. ^[301]

In 1526, [Babur](#) swept across the [Khyber Pass](#) and established the Mughal Empire, which at its zenith covered much of South Asia. ^[302] However, his son [Humayun](#) was defeated by the Afghan warrior [Sher Shah Suri](#) in 1540, and Humayun was forced to retreat to [Kabul](#). After Sher Shah's death, his son [Islam Shah Suri](#) and his Hindu general [Hemu Vikramaditya](#) established secular rule in North India from [Delhi](#) until 1556, when [Akbar](#) (r. 1556–1605), grandson of Babur, defeated Hemu in the [Second Battle of Panipat](#) on 6 November 1556 after winning [Battle of Delhi](#). Akbar tried to establish a good relationship with the Hindus. Akbar declared "Amari" or non-killing of animals in the holy days of Jainism. He rolled back the [jizya](#) tax for non-Muslims. The Mughal emperors married local royalty, allied themselves with local [maharajas](#), and attempted to fuse their Turko-Persian culture with ancient Indian styles, creating a unique [Indo-Persian culture](#) and [Indo-Saracenic architecture](#).

Akbar married a Rajput princess, [Mariam-uz-Zamani](#), and they had a son, [Jahangir](#) (r. 1605–1627). ^[303] Jahangir followed his father's policy. The Mughal dynasty ruled most of the Indian subcontinent by 1600. The reign of [Shah Jahan](#) (r. 1628–1658) was the golden age of Mughal architecture. He erected several large monuments, the most famous of which is the [Taj Mahal](#) at Agra.

It was one of the largest empires to have existed in the Indian subcontinent, ^[304] and surpassed China to become the world's largest economic power, controlling 24.4% of the [world economy](#), ^[305] and the world leader in manufacturing, ^[306] producing 25% of global industrial output. ^[307] The economic and demographic upsurge was stimulated by Mughal [agrarian reforms](#) that intensified agricultural production, ^[308] and a relatively high degree of [urbanisation](#). ^[309]

Other Mughal UNESCO World Heritage Sites



[Agra Fort](#) showing [Yamuna](#) river and [Taj Mahal](#) in the background



[Fatehpur Sikri](#), near Agra, showing [Buland Darwaza](#), the complex built by [Akbar](#), the third Mughal emperor



[Red Fort](#), Delhi, constructed in the year 1648

The Mughal Empire reached the zenith of its territorial expanse during the reign of [Aurangzeb](#) (r. 1658–1707), under whose reign India surpassed Qing China as the world's largest economy. ^{[310][311]} Aurangzeb was less tolerant than his predecessors, reintroducing the *jizya* tax and destroying several historical temples, while at the same time building more Hindu temples than he destroyed, ^[312] employing significantly more Hindus in his imperial bureaucracy than his predecessors, and advancing administrators based on ability rather than religion. ^[313] However, he is often blamed for the erosion of the tolerant syncretic tradition of his predecessors, as well as increasing religious controversy and centralisation. The [English East India Company](#) suffered a defeat in the [Anglo-Mughal War](#). ^{[314][315]}



18th-century political formation in India

The Mughals suffered several blows due to invasions from [Marathas](#), [Rajputs](#), [Jats](#) and [Afghans](#). In 1737, the Maratha general [Bajirao](#) of the Maratha Empire invaded and plundered Delhi. Under the general Amir Khan Umrao Al Udat, the Mughal Emperor sent 8,000 troops to drive away the 5,000 Maratha cavalry soldiers. Baji Rao easily routed the novice Mughal general. In 1737, in the final defeat of Mughal Empire, the commander-in-chief of the Mughal Army, Nizam-ul-mulk, was routed at Bhopal by the Maratha army. This essentially brought an end to the Mughal Empire.

While Bharatpur State under Jat ruler [Suraj Mal](#), overran the Mughal garrison at Agra and plundered the city.^[316] In 1739, [Nader Shah](#), emperor of Iran, defeated the Mughal army at the [Battle of Karnal](#).^[317] After this victory, Nader captured and sacked Delhi, carrying away treasures including the [Peacock Throne](#).^[318] Ahmad Shah Durrani commenced his own invasions as ruler of the [Durrani Empire](#), eventually sacking Delhi in 1757.^[319] Mughal rule was further weakened by constant native Indian resistance; [Banda Singh Bahadur](#) led the [Sikh Khalsa](#) against Mughal religious oppression; Hindu [Rajas](#) of Bengal, [Pratapaditya](#) and [Raja Sitaram Ray](#) revolted; and [Maharaja Chhatrasal](#), of Bundela Rajputs, fought the Mughals and established the [Panna State](#).^[320] The [Mughal dynasty](#) was reduced to puppet rulers by 1757. [Vadda Ghalughara](#) took place under the Muslim provincial government based at [Lahore](#) to wipe out the Sikhs, with 30,000 Sikhs being killed, an offensive that had begun with the Mughals, with the [Chhota Ghallughara](#),^[321] and lasted several decades under its Muslim successor states.^[322]

Maratha Empire

Maratha Empire



Maratha Empire at its peak in 1760 (yellow area), covering much of the Indian subcontinent, stretching from [South India](#) to present-day [Pakistan](#)

[Shaniwarwada](#) palace fort in [Pune](#), the seat of the Peshwa rulers of the Maratha Empire until 1818

The Maratha kingdom was founded and consolidated by [Chatrapati Shivaji](#).^[323] However, the credit for making the Marathas formidable power nationally goes to [Peshwa](#) (chief minister) [Bajirao I](#). Historian K.K. Datta wrote that Bajirao I "may very well be regarded as the second founder of the Maratha Empire".^[324]

In the early 18th century, under the Peshwas, the Marathas consolidated and ruled over much of South Asia. The Marathas are credited to a large extent for ending [Mughal rule](#) in India.^{[325][326][327]} In 1737, the Marathas defeated a Mughal army in their capital, in the [Battle of Delhi](#). The Marathas continued their military campaigns against the Mughals, [Nizam](#), [Nawab of Bengal](#) and the Durrani Empire to further extend their boundaries. At its peak, the domain of the

Marathas encompassed most of the Indian subcontinent.^[328] The Marathas even attempted to capture Delhi and discussed putting [Vishwasrao](#) Peshwa on the throne there in place of the Mughal emperor.^[329]

The Maratha empire at its peak stretched from [Tamil Nadu](#) in the south,^[330] to [Peshawar](#) (modern-day [Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan](#)^[331] [note 2]) in the north, and [Bengal](#) in the east. The Northwestern expansion of the Marathas was stopped after the [Third Battle of Panipat](#) (1761). However, the Maratha authority in the north was re-established within a decade under Peshwa [Madhavrao I](#).^[333]

Under [Madhavrao I](#), the strongest knights were granted semi-autonomy, creating a confederacy of United Maratha states under the [Gaekwads](#) of [Baroda](#), the [Holkars](#) of [Indore](#) and [Malwa](#), the [Scindias](#) of [Gwalior](#) and [Ujjain](#), the [Bhonsales](#) of [Nagpur](#) and the [Puars](#) of [Dhar](#) and [Dewas](#). In 1775, the East India Company intervened in a Peshwa family succession struggle in [Pune](#), which led to the [First Anglo-Maratha War](#), resulting in a Maratha victory.^[334] The Marathas remained a major power in India until their defeat in the [Second](#) and [Third Anglo-Maratha Wars](#) (1805–1818).

Sikh Empire

The Sikh Empire was a political entity that governed the Northwestern regions of the Indian subcontinent, based around the [Punjab](#), from 1799 to 1849. It was forged, on the foundations of the [Khalsa](#), under the leadership of [Maharaja Ranjit Singh](#) (1780–1839).

[Maharaja Ranjit Singh](#) consolidated much of northern India into an empire using his [Sikh Khalsa Army](#), trained in European military techniques and equipped with modern military technologies. Ranjit Singh proved himself to be a master strategist and selected well-qualified generals for his army. He successfully ended the [Afghan-Sikh Wars](#). In stages, he added central Punjab, the provinces of Multan and Kashmir, and the Peshawar Valley to his empire.^{[335][336]}

At its peak in the 19th century, the empire extended from the [Khyber Pass](#) in the west, to [Kashmir](#) in the north, to [Sindh](#) in the south, running along Sutlej river to [Himachal](#) in the east. After the death of Ranjit Singh, the empire weakened, leading to conflict with the British East India Company. The [First Anglo-Sikh War](#) and [Second Anglo-Sikh War](#) marked the downfall of the Sikh Empire, making it among the last areas of the Indian subcontinent to be conquered by the British.

Other kingdoms



Territories of India in 1763

The [Kingdom of Mysore](#) in southern India expanded to its greatest extent under [Hyder Ali](#) and his son [Tipu Sultan](#) in the later half of the 18th century. Under their rule, Mysore fought series of wars against the Marathas and British or their combined forces. The [Maratha–Mysore War](#) ended in April 1787, following the finalising of [treaty of Gajendragad](#), in which Tipu Sultan was obligated to pay tribute to the Marathas. Concurrently, the [Anglo-Mysore Wars](#) took place, where the Mysoreans used the [Mysorean rockets](#). The [Fourth Anglo-Mysore War](#) (1798–1799) saw the death of Tipu. Mysore's alliance with the French was seen as a threat to the British East India Company, and Mysore was attacked from all four sides. The Nizam of Hyderabad and the Marathas launched an invasion from the north. The British won a decisive victory at the [Siege of Seringapatam \(1799\)](#).

Hyderabad was founded by the [Qutb Shahi dynasty](#) of Golconda in 1591. Following a brief Mughal rule, Asif Jah, a Mughal official, seized control of Hyderabad and declared himself [Nizam-al-Mulk of Hyderabad](#) in 1724. The Nizams lost considerable territory and paid tribute to the Maratha Empire after being routed in multiple battles, such as the [Battle of Palkhed](#).^[337] However, the Nizams maintained their sovereignty from 1724 until 1948 through paying tributes to the Marathas, and later, being vassals of the British. [Hyderabad State](#) became a princely state in British India in 1798.

The [Nawabs of Bengal](#) had become the de facto rulers of Bengal following the decline of Mughal Empire. However, their rule was interrupted by Marathas who carried out [six expeditions in Bengal](#) from 1741 to 1748, as a result of which Bengal became a tributary state of Marathas. On 23 June 1757, [Siraj ud-Daulah](#), the last independent Nawab of Bengal was betrayed in the [Battle of Plassey](#) by [Mir Jafar](#). He lost to the British, who took over the charge of Bengal in 1757,

installed Mir Jafar on the *Masnad* (throne) and established itself to a political power in Bengal.^[338] In 1765 the system of Dual Government was established, in which the Nawabs ruled on behalf of the British and were mere puppets to the British. In 1772 the system was abolished and Bengal was brought under the direct control of the British. In 1793, when the *Nizamat* (governorship) of the Nawab was also taken away, they remained as mere pensioners of the British East India Company.^{[339][340]}

In the 18th century, the whole of Rajputana was virtually subdued by the Marathas. The [Second Anglo-Maratha War](#) distracted the Marathas from 1807 to 1809, but afterward Maratha domination of Rajputana resumed. In 1817, the British went to war with the [Pindaris](#), raiders who were fled in Maratha territory, which quickly became the [Third Anglo-Maratha War](#), and the British government offered its protection to the Rajput rulers from the Pindaris and the Marathas. By the end of 1818 similar treaties had been executed between the other Rajput states and Britain. The Maratha [Sindhia](#) ruler of [Gwalior](#) gave up the district of [Ajmer-Merwara](#) to the British, and Maratha influence in Rajasthan came to an end.^[341] Most of the Rajput princes remained loyal to Britain in the [Revolt of 1857](#), and few political changes were made in Rajputana until Indian independence in 1947. The [Rajputana Agency](#) contained more than 20 princely states, most notable being [Udaipur State](#), [Jaipur State](#), [Bikaner State](#) and [Jodhpur State](#).

After the fall of the Maratha Empire, many [Maratha dynasties and states](#) became vassals in a subsidiary alliance with the British. With the decline of the Sikh Empire, after the [First Anglo-Sikh War](#) in 1846, under the terms of the [Treaty of Amritsar](#), the British government sold Kashmir to [Maharaja Gulab Singh](#) and the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, the second-largest princely state in British India, was created by the [Dogra dynasty](#).^{[342][343]} While in eastern and north-eastern India, the Hindu and Buddhist states of [Cooch Behar Kingdom](#), [Twipra Kingdom](#) and [Kingdom of Sikkim](#) were annexed by the British and made vassal princely state.

After the fall of the [Vijayanagara Empire](#), [Polygar](#) states emerged in Southern India; and managed to weather invasions and flourished until the [Polygar Wars](#), where they were defeated by the British East India Company forces.^[344] Around the 18th century, the [Kingdom of Nepal](#) was formed by Rajput rulers.^[345]

European exploration



The route followed in [Vasco da Gama's](#) first voyage (1497–1499)^p

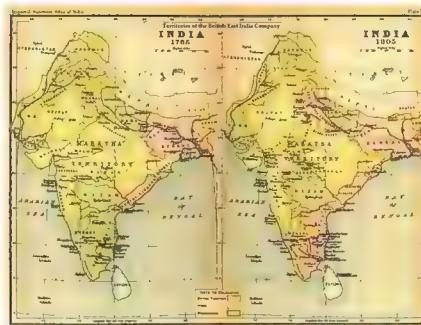
In 1498, a Portuguese fleet under [Vasco da Gama](#) discovered a new sea route from Europe to India, which paved the way for direct Indo-European commerce. The Portuguese soon set up trading posts in [Velha Goa](#), [Damaon](#), [Dio island](#), and [Bombay](#). The Portuguese instituted the [Goa Inquisition](#), where new Indian converts were punished for suspected heresy against Christianity and non-Christians were condemned.^[346] Goa remained the main Portuguese territory until it was annexed by India in 1961.^[347]

The next to arrive were the Dutch, with their main base in [Ceylon](#). They established ports in [Malabar](#). However, their expansion into India was halted after their defeat in the [Battle of Colachel](#) by the [Kingdom of Travancore](#) during the [Travancore-Dutch War](#). The Dutch never recovered from the defeat and no longer posed a large colonial threat to India.^{[348][349]}

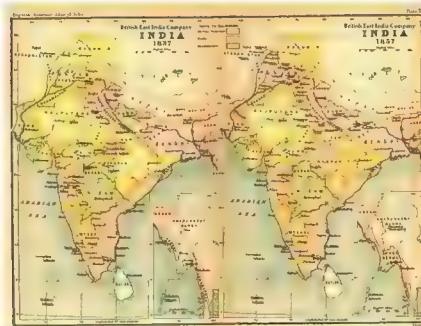
The internal conflicts among Indian kingdoms gave opportunities to the European traders to gradually establish political influence and appropriate lands. Following the Dutch, the British – who set up in the west coast port of [Surat](#) in 1619 – and the French both established trading outposts in India. Although continental European powers controlled various coastal regions of southern and eastern India during the ensuing century, they eventually lost all their territories in India to the British, with the exception of the French outposts of [Pondichéry](#) and [Chandernagore](#), and the Portuguese colonies of [Goa](#), [Daman](#) and [Diu](#).^{[350][351]}

East India Company rule in India

India under East India Company rule



India in 1765 and 1805 showing East India Company Territories in pink



India in 1837 and 1857 showing East India Company (pink) and other territories

The English East India Company was founded in 1600. It gained a foothold in India with the establishment of a [factory](#) in [Masulipatnam](#) on the Eastern coast of India in 1611 and a grant of rights by the Mughal emperor Jahangir to establish a factory in [Surat](#) in 1612. In 1640, after receiving similar permission from the [Vijayanagara ruler](#) farther south, a second factory was established in [Madras](#) on the southeastern coast. The islet of [Bom Bahia](#) in present-day Mumbai (Bombay) was a Portuguese [outpost](#) not far from Surat. It was presented to [Charles II of England](#) as [dowry](#) in his marriage to [Catherine of Braganza](#). Charles in turn leased Bombay to the Company in 1668. Two decades later, the company established a [trade post](#) in the [River Ganges](#) delta. During this time other companies established by the [Portuguese](#), [Dutch](#), [French](#), and [Danish](#) were similarly expanding in the subcontinent.

The company's victory under [Robert Clive](#) in the 1757 [Battle of Plassey](#) and another victory in the 1764 [Battle of Buxar](#) (in Bihar), consolidated the company's power, and forced emperor [Shah Alam II](#) to appoint it the *diwan*, or revenue collector, of Bengal, Bihar, and [Orissa](#). The company thus became the *de facto* ruler of large areas of the [lower Gangetic plain](#) by 1773. It also proceeded by degrees to expand its dominions around Bombay and Madras. The [Anglo-Mysore Wars](#) (1766–99) and the [Anglo-Maratha Wars](#) (1772–1818) left it in control of large areas of India south of the [Sutlej River](#). With the defeat of the [Marathas](#), no native power represented a threat for the company any longer.^[352]

The expansion of the company's power chiefly took two forms. The first of these was the outright annexation of Indian states and subsequent direct governance of the underlying regions that collectively came to comprise British India. The annexed regions included the [North-Western](#)

Provinces (comprising [Rohilkhand](#), [Gorakhpur](#), and the [Doab](#)) (1801), [Delhi](#) (1803), [Assam](#) ([Ahom Kingdom](#) 1828) and [Sindh](#) (1843). [Punjab](#), [North-West Frontier Province](#), and [Kashmir](#) were annexed after the [Anglo-Sikh Wars](#) in 1849–56 (Period of tenure of Marquess of Dalhousie Governor General). However, [Kashmir](#) was immediately sold under the [Treaty of Amritsar](#) (1850) to the [Dogra Dynasty](#) of [Jammu](#) and thereby became a princely state. In 1854, [Berar](#) was annexed along with the state of [Oudh](#) two years later.



[Warren Hastings](#), the first governor-general of [Fort William \(Bengal\)](#) who oversaw the company's territories in India



Gold coin, minted 1835, with obverse showing the bust of [William IV](#), king of United Kingdom from 26 June 1830 to 20 June 1837, and reverse marked "Two mohurs" in English (do [ashrafi](#) in Urdu) issued during [Company rule in India](#)



Photograph (1855) showing the construction of the Bhor Ghaut incline bridge, Bombay; the incline was conceived by George Clark, the Chief Engineer in the East India Company's Government of Bombay

The second form of asserting power involved treaties in which Indian rulers acknowledged the company's [hegemony](#) in return for limited internal [autonomy](#). Since the company operated under financial constraints, it had to set up *political* underpinnings for its rule.^[353] The most important such support came from the [subsidiary alliances](#) with Indian princes.^[353] In the early 19th century, the territories of these princes accounted for two-thirds of India.^[353] When an Indian ruler who was able to secure his territory wanted to enter such an alliance, the company welcomed it as an economical method of indirect rule that did not involve the economic costs of direct administration or the political costs of gaining the support of alien subjects.^[354]

In return, the company undertook the "defense of these subordinate allies and treated them with traditional respect and marks of honor."^[354] Subsidiary alliances created the [Princely States](#) of the Hindu [maharajas](#) and the Muslim [nawabs](#). Prominent among the princely states were [Cochin](#) (1791), [Jaipur](#) (1794), [Travancore](#) (1795), [Hyderabad](#) (1798), [Mysore](#) (1799), [Cis-Sutlej Hill States](#) (1815), [Central India Agency](#) (1819), [Cutch](#) and [Gujarat Gaikwad territories](#) (1819), [Rajputana](#) (1818),^[355] and [Bahawalpur](#) (1833).

Indian indenture system

The Indian indenture system was an ongoing system of indenture, a form of debt bondage, by which 3.5 million Indians were transported to colonies of European powers to provide labour for the (mainly sugar) plantations. It started from the end of slavery in 1833 and continued until 1920. This resulted in the development of a large [Indian diaspora](#) that spread from the Caribbean to the Pacific Ocean and the growth of large [Indo-Caribbean](#) and [Indo-African](#) populations.

Late modern period and contemporary history (1857–1947)

Rebellion of 1857 and its consequences



[Lakshmibai, the Rani of Jhansi](#), one of the principal leaders of the rebellion who earlier had lost her kingdom as a result of the [Doctrine of lapse](#).



[Bahadur Shah Zafar](#), the last Mughal Emperor. Crowned Emperor of India by the rebels, he was deposed by the British and died in exile in Burma.



[Charles Canning](#), the Governor-General of India during the rebellion.



[Lord Dalhousie](#), the Governor-General of India from 1848 to 1856,

who devised the
[Doctrine of Lapse](#).

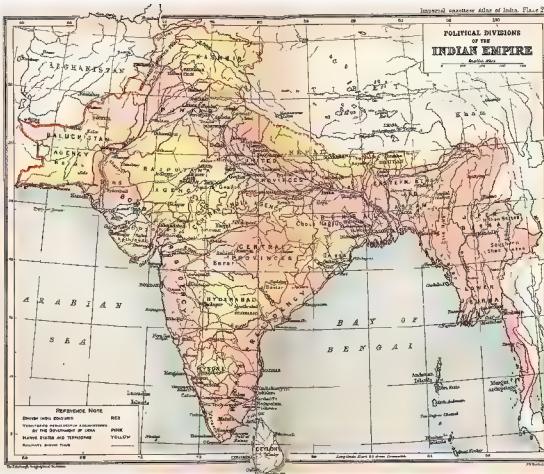
The Indian rebellion of 1857 was a large-scale rebellion by soldiers employed by the British East India Company in northern and central India against the company's rule. The spark that led to the mutiny was the issue of new gunpowder cartridges for the Enfield rifle, which was insensitive to local religious prohibition. The key mutineer was [Mangal Pandey](#).^[356] In addition, the underlying grievances over British taxation, the ethnic gulf between the British officers and their Indian troops and land annexations played a significant role in the rebellion. Within weeks after Pandey's mutiny, dozens of units of the Indian army joined peasant armies in widespread rebellion. The rebel soldiers were later joined by Indian nobility, many of whom had lost titles and domains under the [Doctrine of Lapse](#) and felt that the company had interfered with a traditional system of inheritance. Rebel leaders such as [Nana Sahib](#) and the [Rani of Jhansi](#) belonged to this group.^[357]

After the outbreak of the mutiny in [Meerut](#), the rebels very quickly reached Delhi. The rebels had also captured large tracts of the [North-Western Provinces](#) and [Awadh](#) (Oudh). Most notably, in Awadh, the rebellion took on the attributes of a patriotic revolt against British presence.^[358] However, the British East India Company mobilised rapidly with the assistance of friendly [Princely states](#), but it took the British the better part of 1858 to suppress the rebellion. Due to the rebels being poorly equipped and having no outside support or funding, they were brutally subdued.^[359]

In the aftermath, all power was transferred from the British East India Company to the [British Crown](#), which began to administer most of India as provinces. The Crown controlled the company's lands directly and had considerable indirect influence over the rest of India, which consisted of the Princely states ruled by local royal families. There were officially 565 princely states in 1947, but only 21 had actual state governments, and only three were large (Mysore, Hyderabad, and Kashmir). They were absorbed into the independent nation in 1947–48.^[360]

British Raj (1858–1947)

British Raj



The British Indian Empire in 1909. British India is shown in pink; the [princely states](#) in yellow.

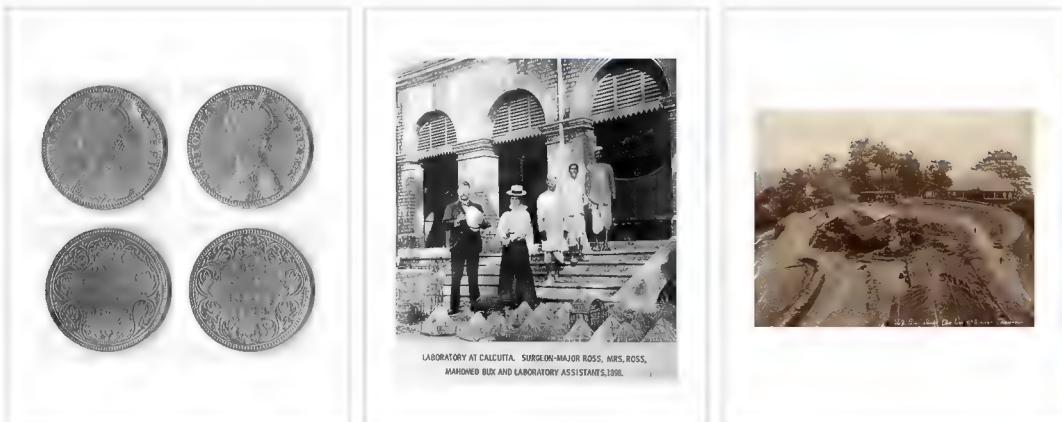


A 1903 stereographic image of [Victoria Terminus](#) a [terminal train station](#), in Mumbai, completed in 1887, and now a [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#).

After 1857, the colonial government strengthened and expanded its infrastructure via the court system, legal procedures, and statutes. The [Indian Penal Code](#) came into being.^[361] In education, [Thomas Babington Macaulay](#) had made schooling a priority for the Raj in 1835 and succeeded in implementing the [use of English](#) for instruction. By 1890 some 60,000 Indians had matriculated.^[362] The Indian economy grew at about 1% per year from 1880 to 1920, and the population also grew at 1%. However, from 1910s Indian private industry began to grow significantly. India built a modern railway system in the late 19th century which was the fourth largest in the world.^[363] Historians have been divided on issues of economic history, with the Nationalist school arguing that India was poorer due to British rule.^[364]

In 1905, [Lord Curzon](#) split the large province of Bengal into a largely Hindu western half and "Eastern Bengal and Assam", a largely Muslim eastern half. The British goal was said to be efficient administration but the people of Bengal were outraged at the apparent "divide and rule" strategy. It also marked the beginning of the organised anti-colonial movement. When the Liberal party in Britain came to power in 1906, he was removed. Bengal was reunified in 1911. The new Viceroy Gilbert Minto and the new Secretary of State for India [John Morley](#) consulted with Congress leaders on political reforms. The [Morley-Minto reforms of 1909](#) provided for Indian membership of the provincial executive councils as well as the Viceroy's executive council. The Imperial Legislative Council was enlarged from 25 to 60 members and separate communal representation for Muslims was established in a dramatic step towards representative and responsible government.^[365] Several socio-religious organisations came into being at that time.

Muslims set up the [All India Muslim League](#) in 1906 to protect the interests of the aristocratic Muslims. The [Hindu Mahasabha](#) and [Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh](#) (RSS) sought to represent Hindu interests though the latter always claimed it to be a "cultural" organisation.^[366] Sikhs founded the [Shiromani Akali Dal](#) in 1920.^[367] However, the largest and oldest political party [Indian National Congress](#), founded in 1885, attempted to keep a distance from the socio-religious movements and identity politics.^[368]



Two silver rupee coins issued by the British Raj in 1862 and 1886 respectively, the first in obverse showing a bust of [Victoria, Queen](#), the second of Victoria, Empress. Victoria became [Empress of India](#) in 1876.

[Ronald Ross](#), left, at [Cunningham's](#) laboratory of Presidency Hospital in Calcutta, where the transmission of [malaria](#) by mosquitoes was discovered, winning Ross the second [Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine](#) in 1902.

A [Darjeeling Himalayan Railway](#) train shown in 1870. The railway became a [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#) in 1999.



A second-day cancellation of the stamps issued in February 1931 to commemorate the inauguration of [New Delhi](#) as the capital of the British Indian Empire.

Between 1858 and 1911,
Calcutta had been the
capital of the Raj.

Indian Renaissance



Sir [Syed Ahmad Khan](#) (1817–1898), the author of *Causes of the Indian Mutiny*, was the founder of [Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College](#), later the [Aligarh Muslim University](#)



Ramabai

[Pandita Ramabai](#) (1858–1922) was a [social reformer](#), and a pioneer in the education and emancipation of women in India



[Rabindranath Tagore](#) (1861–1941) was a [Bengali language](#) poet, short-story writer, and playwright, and in addition a music composer and painter, who won the Nobel prize for Literature in 1913



[Srinivasa Ramanujan](#) (1887–1920) was an Indian mathematician who made seminal contributions to [number theory](#)

The Bengali Renaissance refers to a social reform movement, dominated by [Bengali Hindus](#), in the [Bengal region](#) of the Indian subcontinent during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period of British rule. Historian [Nitish Sengupta](#) describes the renaissance as having started

with reformer and humanitarian [Raja Ram Mohan Roy](#) (1775–1833), and ended with Asia's first Nobel laureate [Rabindranath Tagore](#) (1861–1941).^[369] This flowering of religious and social reformers, scholars, and writers is described by historian [David Kopf](#) as "one of the most creative periods in Indian history."^[370]

During this period, Bengal witnessed an [intellectual awakening](#) that is in some way similar to the [Renaissance](#). This movement questioned existing orthodoxies, particularly with respect to women, marriage, the [dowry](#) system, the [caste system](#), and religion. One of the earliest [social movements](#) that emerged during this time was the [Young Bengal](#) movement, which espoused [rationalism](#) and [atheism](#) as the common denominators of civil conduct among upper caste educated Hindus.^[371] It played an important role in reawakening Indian minds and intellect across the Indian subcontinent.

Famines



Map of famines in India during the [British Empire](#) in year 1800–1885.



Engraving from [The Graphic](#), October 1877, showing the plight of animals as well as humans in [Bellary district](#), [Madras Presidency](#), British India during the [Great Famine of 1876–1878](#)



Government famine relief, Ahmedabad, India, during the [Indian famine of 1899–1900](#)

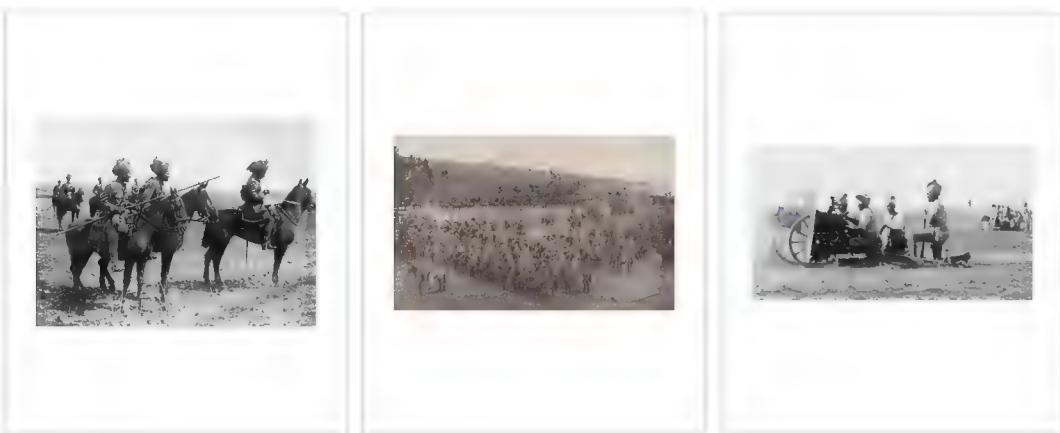


A picture of orphans who survived the [Bengal famine of 1943](#)

1943, a man-made disaster by the British government

During British East India Company and British Crown rule, India experienced some of deadliest ever recorded [famines](#). These famines, usually resulting from crop failures and often exacerbated by policies of the colonial government,^[372] included the [Great Famine of 1876–1878](#) in which 6.1 million to 10.3 million people died,^[373] the [Great Bengal famine of 1770](#) where between 1 and 10 million people died,^{[374][375]} the [Indian famine of 1899–1900](#) in which 1.25 to 10 million people died,^[372] and the [Bengal famine of 1943](#) where between 2.1 and 3.8 million people died.^[376] The [Third plague pandemic](#) in the mid-19th century killed 10 million people in India.^[377] Despite persistent diseases and famines, the population of the Indian subcontinent, which stood at up to 200 million in 1750,^[378] had reached 389 million by 1941.^[379]

World War I



Indian Cavalry on the Western front 1914

Indian cavalry from the [Deccan Horse](#) during the [Battle of Bazentin Ridge](#) in 1916.

Indian Army gunners (probably 39th Battery) with [3.7-inch mountain howitzers](#), Jerusalem 1917



India Gate is a memorial to 70,000 soldiers of the [British Indian Army](#) who

died in the period 1914–
21 in the First World War

During [World War I](#), over 800,000 volunteered for the army, and more than 400,000 volunteered for non-combat roles, compared with the pre-war annual recruitment of about 15,000 men. ^[380] The Army saw early action on the [Western Front](#) at the [First Battle of Ypres](#). After a year of front-line duty, sickness and casualties had reduced the Indian Corps to the point where it had to be withdrawn. Nearly 700,000 Indians fought the Turks in the Mesopotamian campaign. Indian formations were also sent to East Africa, Egypt, and Gallipoli. ^[381]

Indian Army and [Imperial Service Troops](#) fought during the [Sinai and Palestine Campaign](#)'s defence of the Suez Canal in 1915, at [Romani](#) in 1916 and to [Jerusalem](#) in 1917. India units occupied the Jordan Valley and after the [German spring offensive](#) they became the major force in the [Egyptian Expeditionary Force](#) during the [Battle of Megiddo](#) and in the [Desert Mounted Corps](#)' advance to [Damascus](#) and on to [Aleppo](#). Other divisions remained in India guarding the [North-West Frontier](#) and fulfilling internal security obligations.

One million Indian troops served abroad during the war. In total, 74,187 died, ^[382] and another 67,000 were wounded. ^[383] The roughly 90,000 soldiers who died fighting in World War I and the [Afghan Wars](#) are commemorated by the [India Gate](#).

World War II



General [Claude Auchinleck](#) (right), Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, with the then [Viceroy Wavell](#) (centre) and General [Montgomery](#) (left)

Indian women training for [Air Raid Precautions](#) (ARP) duties in Bombay in 1942

Indian infantrymen of the [7th Rajput Regiment](#) about to go on patrol on the [Arakan front](#) in Burma, 1944



The stamp series

"Victory" issued by the Government of British India to commemorate allied victory in World War II

British India officially declared war on [Nazi Germany](#) in September 1939.^[384] The British Raj, as part of the [Allied Nations](#), sent over two and a half million volunteer soldiers to fight under British command against the [Axis powers](#). Additionally, several Princely States provided large donations to support the Allied campaign. India also provided the base for American operations in support of China in the [China Burma India Theatre](#).

Indians fought throughout the world, including in the [European theatre against Germany](#), in [North Africa against Germany and Italy](#), against the Italians in [East Africa](#), in the [Middle East](#) against the [Vichy French](#), in the [South Asian region](#) defending [India against the Japanese](#) and fighting the [Japanese in Burma](#). Indians also aided in liberating British colonies such as [Singapore](#) and [Hong Kong](#) after the Japanese surrender in August 1945. Over 87,000 soldiers from the subcontinent died in World War II.

The [Indian National Congress](#) denounced Nazi Germany but would not fight it or anyone else until India was independent. Congress launched the [Quit India Movement](#) in August 1942, refusing to co-operate in any way with the government until independence was granted. The government immediately arrested over 60,000 national and local Congress leaders. The [Muslim League](#) rejected the Quit India movement and worked closely with the Raj authorities.

[Subhas Chandra Bose](#) (also called *Netaji*) broke with Congress and tried to form a military alliance with Germany or Japan to gain independence. The Germans assisted Bose in the formation of the [Indian Legion](#),^[385] however, it was Japan that helped him revamp the [Indian National Army \(INA\)](#), after the [First Indian National Army](#) under [Mohan Singh](#) was dissolved. The INA fought under Japanese direction, mostly in Burma.^[386] Bose also headed the [Provisional Government of Free India](#) (or [Azad Hind](#)), a government-in-exile based in Singapore.^{[387][388]}

By 1942, neighbouring [Burma](#) was invaded by Japan, which by then had already captured the Indian territory of [Andaman and Nicobar Islands](#). Japan gave nominal control of the islands to the [Provisional Government of Free India](#) on 21 October 1943, and in the following March, the Indian National Army with the help of Japan crossed into India and advanced as far as [Kohima](#) in [Nagaland](#). This advance on the mainland of the Indian subcontinent reached its farthest point on Indian territory, retreating from the [Battle of Kohima](#) in June and from [that of Imphal](#) on 3 July 1944.

The region of Bengal in British India [suffered a devastating famine during 1940–1943](#). An estimated 2.1–3 million died from the famine, frequently characterised as "man-made", ^[389] with most sources asserting that wartime [colonial](#) policies exacerbated the crisis. ^[390]

Indian independence movement (1885–1947)



The first session of the [Indian National Congress](#) in 1885. A. O. Hume, the founder, is shown in the middle (third row from the front). The Congress was the first modern nationalist movement to emerge in the British Empire in Asia and Africa. ^[391]

Front page of the *Tribune* (25 March 1931), reporting the execution of [Bhagat Singh](#), [Rajguru](#) and [Sukhdev](#) by the British for the murder of 21-year-old police officer J. P. Saunders. Bhagat Singh quickly became a folk hero of the Indian independence movement.

From the late 19th century, and especially after 1920, under the leadership of [Mahatma Gandhi](#) (right), the Congress became the principal leader of the [Indian independence movement](#). ^[392] Gandhi is shown here with [Jawaharlal Nehru](#), later the first prime minister of India.

The numbers of British in India were small, ^[393] yet they were able to rule 52% of the Indian subcontinent directly and exercise considerable leverage over the [princely states](#) that accounted for 48% of the area. ^[394]

One of the most important events of the 19th century was the rise of Indian nationalism,^[395] leading Indians to seek first "self-rule" and later "complete independence". However, historians are divided over the causes of its rise. Probable reasons include a "clash of interests of the Indian people with British interests",^[395] "racial discriminations",^[396] and "the revelation of India's past".^[397]

The first step toward Indian self-rule was the appointment of [councillors](#) to advise the British [viceroy](#) in 1861 and the first Indian was appointed in 1909. Provincial Councils with Indian members were also set up. The councillors' participation was subsequently widened into legislative councils. The British built a large [British Indian Army](#), with the senior officers all British and many of the troops from small minority groups such as [Gurkhas](#) from Nepal and [Sikhs](#).^[398] The civil service was increasingly filled with natives at the lower levels, with the British holding the more senior positions.^[399]

[Bal Gangadhar Tilak](#), an Indian nationalist leader, declared [Swaraj](#) (home rule) as the destiny of the nation. His popular sentence "Swaraj is my birthright, and I shall have it"^[400] became the source of inspiration. Tilak was backed by rising public leaders like [Bipin Chandra Pal](#) and [Lala Lajpat Rai](#), who held the same point of view, notably they advocated the [Swadeshi movement](#) involving the boycott of imported items and the use of Indian-made goods;^[401] the triumvirate were popularly known as [Lal Bal Pal](#). In 1907, the Congress was split into two factions: The radicals, led by Tilak, advocated civil agitation and direct revolution to overthrow the British Empire and the abandonment of all things British. The moderates, led by leaders like [Dadabhai Naoroji](#) and [Gopal Krishna Gokhale](#), on the other hand, wanted reform within the framework of British rule.^[401]

The [partition of Bengal in 1905](#) further increased the [revolutionary movement for Indian independence](#). The disenfranchisement lead some to take violent action.

The British themselves adopted a "carrot and stick" approach in response to renewed nationalist demands. The means of achieving the proposed measure were later enshrined in the [Government of India Act 1919](#), which introduced the principle of a dual mode of administration, or diarchy, in which elected Indian legislators and appointed British officials shared power.^[402] In 1919, Colonel [Reginald Dyer](#) ordered his troops to fire their weapons on peaceful protestors, including unarmed women and children, resulting in the [Jallianwala Bagh massacre](#); which led to the [Non-cooperation Movement](#) of 1920–1922. The massacre was a decisive episode towards the end of British rule in India.^[403]

From 1920 leaders such as [Mahatma Gandhi](#) began highly popular mass movements to campaign against the British Raj using largely peaceful methods. The Gandhi-led independence movement opposed the British rule using non-violent methods like [non-co-operation](#), [civil disobedience](#) and [economic resistance](#). However, [revolutionary activities](#) against the British rule

took place throughout the Indian subcontinent and some others adopted a militant approach like the [Hindustan Republican Association](#), that sought to overthrow British rule by armed struggle.

The [All India Azad Muslim Conference](#) gathered in Delhi in April 1940 to voice its support for an independent and united India.^[404] Its members included several Islamic organisations in India, as well as 1,400 nationalist Muslim delegates.^{[405][406][407]} The pro-separatist All-India Muslim League worked to try to silence those nationalist Muslims who stood against the partition of India, often using "intimidation and coercion".^{[406][407]} The murder of the All India Azad Muslim Conference leader [Allah Bakhsh Soomro](#) also made it easier for the pro-separatist All-India Muslim League to demand the creation of a Pakistan.^[407]

After World War II (c. 1946–1947)

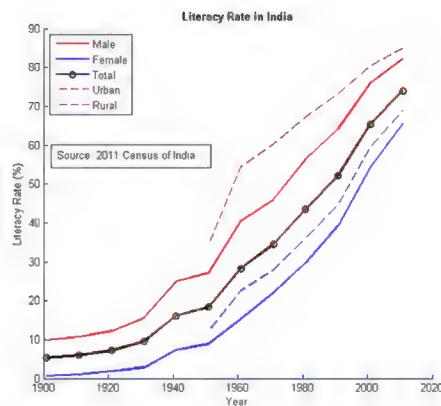
In January 1946, several mutinies broke out in the armed services, starting with that of RAF servicemen frustrated with their slow repatriation. The mutinies came to a head with [mutiny of the Royal Indian Navy in Bombay](#) in February 1946, followed by others in [Calcutta](#), [Madras](#), and [Karachi](#). The mutinies were rapidly suppressed. In early 1946, new elections were called and [Congress](#) candidates won in eight of the eleven provinces.

Late in 1946, the Labour government decided to end British rule of India, and in early 1947 it announced its intention of transferring power no later than June 1948 and participating in the formation of an [interim government](#).

Along with the desire for independence, tensions between Hindus and Muslims had also been developing over the years. Muslim League leader [Muhammad Ali Jinnah](#) proclaimed 16 August 1946 as [Direct Action Day](#), with the stated goal of highlighting, peacefully, the demand for a Muslim homeland in British India, which resulted in the outbreak of the cycle of violence that would be later called the "[Great Calcutta Killing of August 1946](#)". The communal violence spread to [Bihar](#), [Noakhali](#) in Bengal, [Garhmukteshwar](#) in the [United Provinces](#), and on to [Rawalpindi](#) in March 1947 in which Sikhs and Hindus were [attacked or driven out](#) by Muslims.

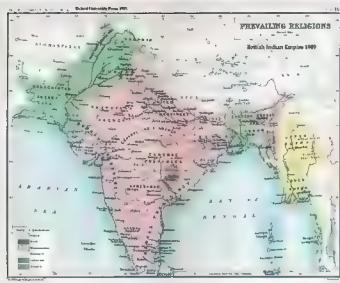
"A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new; when an age ends; and when the soul of a nation long suppressed finds utterance."

— From, [Tryst with destiny](#), a speech given by [Jawaharlal Nehru](#) to the [Constituent Assembly of India](#) on the eve of independence, 14 August 1947.^[408]



Literacy in India grew very slowly until independence in 1947. An acceleration in the rate of literacy growth occurred in the 1991–2001 period.

Independence and partition (1947–present)



A map of the prevailing religions of the British Indian empire based on district-wise majorities based on the Indian census of 1909, and published in the [Imperial Gazetteer of India](#). The partition of the [Punjab](#) and Bengal was based on such majorities.



Gandhi touring [Bela, Bihar](#), a village struck by religious rioting in March 1947. On the right is [Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan](#).



[Jawaharlal Nehru](#) being sworn in as the first prime minister of independent India by viceroy [Lord Louis Mountbatten](#) at 8:30 AM 15 August 1947.

In August 1947, the British Indian Empire was partitioned into the [Union of India](#) and [Dominion of Pakistan](#). In particular, the partition of the [Punjab](#) and Bengal led to rioting between Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs in these provinces and spread to other nearby regions, leaving some 500,000 dead. The police and army units were largely ineffective. The British officers were gone, and the units were beginning to tolerate if not actually indulge in violence against their religious enemies. [\[409\]](#)[\[410\]](#)[\[411\]](#) Also, this period saw one of the largest mass migrations anywhere in modern history, with a total of 12 million Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims moving between the newly created nations of India and Pakistan (which gained independence on 15 and 14 August 1947).

respectively).^[410] In 1971, [Bangladesh](#), formerly East Pakistan and [East Bengal](#), seceded from Pakistan.^[412]

See also

- [Adivasi](#)
- [Early Indians](#)
- [India \(Herodotus\)](#)
- [List of Indian periods](#)
- [The Cambridge History of India](#)
- [Outline of ancient India](#)
- [Timeline of Indian history](#)
- **By topic**
- [Culture](#)
- [Economy](#)
- [Historiography](#)
- [Foreign relations](#)
- [Maritime](#)
- [Languages](#)
- [Military](#)
- [Physical culture](#)
- [Medieval taxation](#)

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Notes

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